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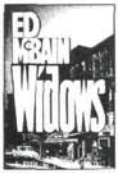

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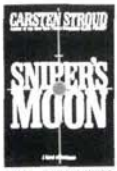

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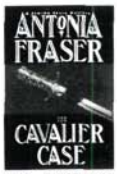

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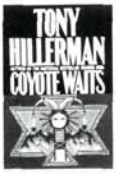

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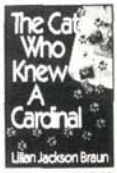

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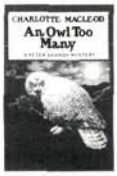

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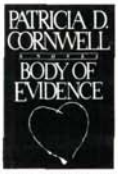

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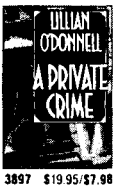

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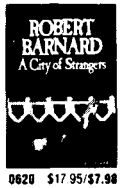

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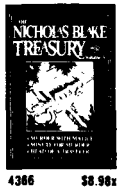

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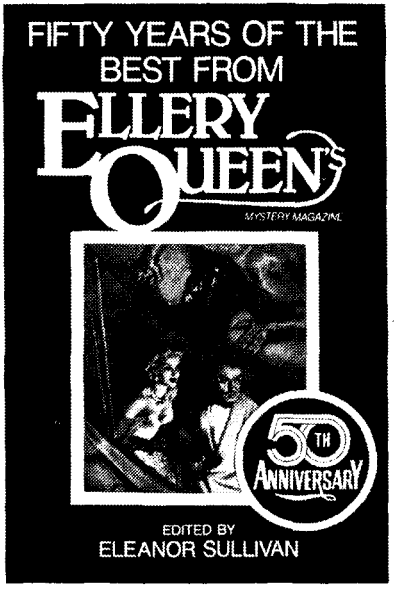

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When Robert L. Fish's short story "The Adventure of the Ascot Tie" appeared in EQMM's Department of First Stories in the February 1960 issue, the Cleveland-born writer was living in Rio de Janeiro, working as a consulting engineer to the Brazilian vinyl-plastics industry. Though he was already in his mid-forties, Bob took up writing as a second career and made up for his late start by the quality and versatility of his talents. He could be broadly humorous, as in his adventures of Schlock Homes—Sherlockian parodies bursting with puns—but he was also a master of the realistic crime story. In 1962, he won an Edgar from the Mystery Writers of America for best first novel for The Fugitive, *introducing his best-known character, Captain Jose da Silva, the detective as much at home in the Brazilian jungles as on the streets of Manhattan.*

Writing under the name of Robert L. Pike, Bob also created American police lieutenant Clancy in the novel Mute Witness, *which was later the basis for the film* Bullitt, *starring Steve McQueen. Bob's various series characters are worlds apart from each other, but one thing that brings them together is his ability to make them entertaining. He once said he wrote the kinds of stories and books that he liked to read. "If I can get a reader to turn the page, I feel I have succeeded in what I started out to do."*

He won his second Edgar Award in 1971 for best short story—for "Moonlight Gardener" (Argosy). *But probably his greatest honor from the Mystery Writers of America was the establishment of the Robert L. Fish Award for best first mystery story of the year, a perfect tribute to a man who during his lifetime was uncommonly generous in his encouragement and praise of beginning writers. The following two stories by him celebrate the aforementioned versatility and the vitality of his own remarkable gift for the short story . . .*

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THE ADVENTURE OF THE PERFORATED ULSTER

by ROBERT L. FISH

A hiatus in cases of any serious consequence during the early months of the year '66 allowed my friend Mr. Schlock Homes an opportunity for some well needed rest, as well as a chance to indulge in a few of his hobbies. I recall in particular how diligently he practiced his prestidigitation in preparation for the annual Magician's Meet; but I am saddened to relate that when it finally was held, poor Homes was found wanding.

The same period, however, permitted me to bring some order to my voluminous notes, and it is well that I did so, for two cases which I had planned on ultimately relating turned out to be nothing of the sort. Homes had been writing a treatise on the mating-dance of the *ondatra bibethecus* and I had somehow mistakenly incorporated his notes in my casebook as *The Adventure of the Muskrat Ritual.* An even greater embarrassment was narrowly avoided when I discovered a long series of correspondence covering an unpaid bill of Homes's to a doctor at a local hospital, which I had erroneously filed as *The Adventure of the Patient Resident.*

Time, however, permitted the correction of these errors, and it was with a feeling of growing ennui that I came into the breakfast room of our quarters at 221-B Bagel Street one bright morning in April to find Homes already ensconced at the table, his creamed kipper already finished, and lighting his first after-meal Bulgarian. He smiled brightly as I entered and I noticed a telegraph form fluttering from his thin fingers.

"Ah, Watney!" said he, his eyes sparkling. "It appears our inactivity is about to end. My brother Criscroft has telegraphed that he intends to drop by this morning and, as you are well aware, such visits in the past have invariably led to the most interesting of problems. I trust this occasion will prove no exception."

"But he offers no clew?" I inquired, sitting down and drawing my napkin under my chin.

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"He says—but never mind. Here, unless I am greatly mistaken, is Criscroft himself."

He turned toward the door and a moment later our page had ushered in Homes's illustrious brother. With a brusque refusal of a kipper, Criscroft flung himself into a chair and stared at us broodingly.

"Schlock," he said at last, his voice heavy with worry, "I know that in the past I have often brought you problems affecting the well-being of our country, but believe me when I say that never before has one of our basic institutions been faced with so dire a threat!"

Homes leaned forward, his voice deeply sympathetic. "As you well know," he said sincerely, "I am always at your service. Pray, how may I be of assistance?"

Criscroft shook his head in misery. "I greatly fear," he said in a tone heavy with dread, "that we have a case of pilfering at our club."

Homes's eyebrows lifted slightly. "But, certainly," he said with a frown, "a simple case of pilfering should not upset you to this degree. Any club might have an unfortunate member who temporarily finds his needs greater than his means."

Criscroft's face had fallen—if possible—even lower during this discourse. "You do not understand," he said, his voice almost breaking. "It is far more serious than that. Our club has *not* been pilfered. The pilfering, I fear, was done for the *benefit* of our club!"

Homes's frown deepened. He tented his fingers and stared across the ridgepole of his knuckles into his brother's tortured eyes. "You mean—?"

"Exactly! Were it to be bruited about that our financial status was so precarious that such assistance was necessary to maintain us, the mere rumor might easily shatter the confidence of the public in this staunchest of all our national institutions!"

"And you think—?"

"Indubitably! Were people to begin doubting the solidity of our British clubs, there is no predicting to what dark ends these suspicions might lead!"

"And you suspect—?"

"Definitely! It is obvious that the perpetrator of this foul deed is not doing it out of idle whim, nor would he take so drastic a step out of mere personal spite."

"And you conclude—?"

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"Precisely! He is therefore acting under the orders of some group dedicated to the destruction of our system. Undoubtedly a foreign group, since no Englishman, however treasonous, would be so subversive as to attack the institution of the British Club!" A look of peace replaced the agonized expression on his face. "You cannot know how good it is, Schlock, to benefit from your analysis. And I am convinced you are right!"

"Thank you," Homes replied modestly and leaned forward again. "Pray favor us with the details."

"Of course," Criscroft agreed. "Well, as you may or may not know, I have recently assumed the chairmanship of our club's House Committee, and in this capacity I have the responsibility for the operation of the bar and kitchen. I have therefore taken, of late, to inspecting the culinary premises at odd hours, in order to see how the steward is handling his duties."

He paused a moment to collect his thoughts, and then continued: "Well, about a week ago, on one of my periodic tours of the kitchen, I chanced to note a new coffee percolator. I said nothing at the time, but I later made it my business to go back over the Committee minutes, and I found no recommendation for the purchase of this percolator, nor, in fact, any appropriation by the Finance Committee for its acquisition."

"And you considered this odd?"

"Extremely odd, particularly since few of our members are addicted to the bean, considering it quite rightly a colonial affectation. However, I continued to maintain my own counsel, awaiting further developments. And then, just the other evening, in checking the bar equipment for our annual Walpurgis Night Dinner—Lord Walpurgis being one of our oldest members—I was amazed to discover a new cocktail shaker."

"A cocktail shaker?" Homes's eyebrows shot up.

Criscroft smiled grimly. "You also note the foreign touch, eh? As we all know, a cocktail shaker tends to bruise whisky, and no true Englishman would think of employing one."

"Certainly not!" Homes exclaimed indignantly. His voice became probing. "And I assume that again there had been neither recommendation nor appropriation for its purchase?"

"Neither. I knew then, of course, that the matter was far more serious than a simple error in judgment, and I felt it vital to seek your aid."

"And well that you did so! What is the name of this steward?"

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"Sean O'Callahan."

A thoughtful frown crossed the lean face of my friend. "Not an English name," he said slowly.

"Now that you mention it, it does sound foreign," Criscroft replied, and then looked troubled. "It is my hope that Sean is only an innocent dupe in the scheme. He is the fifteenth generation of O'Callahans to serve in that position at our club and I should hate to think of him as a traitor."

"Still," Homes continued, his eyes glittering, "I assume you investigated him?"

"To the limited extent of our ability. I have had four men from the Foreign Office on his trail for the past twenty-four hours, have had his telephone tapped, and have even had secret microphones concealed in his attic bedroom at the club. Unfortunately, the A.I.C. men who installed them apparently did the job backwards, so I fear they have been less than effective. He can hear us, but we cannot hear him. However, since the building is an old one, and fairly well inhabited by mice, I doubt if he ascribes too much importance to the additional sounds of our conversation."

Homes came to his feet, striding up and down the room, his hands clasped tightly behind him. "So to date you have been unable to earth anything? I mean, able to unearth nothing?"

"Only this," said Criscroft, reaching into a pocket and producing a small thin pamphlet. "In the manner of the Purloined Letter, it was cleverly concealed by simply leaving it on the top of his dresser, which, I must admit, is quite suspicious in itself. However, I doubt if you will find it of much use. Our code experts claim it is beyond their ability to solve."

He handed the small brochure to Homes, who instantly dropped back into his chair to peruse it. I came to stand behind my friend while he examined the publication, and I reproduce its cover above right for the benefit of such readers who are still with us.

Homes studied the cover for several moments, and then slowly riffled the pages. The small booklet opened almost by itself to a page which illustrated a variety of cocktail shakers. He then turned several more pages, noting the detailed and colourful drawings and photographs of the items therein, and then shut the pamphlet with a dark frown upon his face.

"Schlock!" Criscroft cried, noting his brother's expression. "What is it?"

Homes turned a worried face in his direction.

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"You can see the extreme care that has gone into the preparation of this booklet," he said heavily. "Certainly they would not have gone to this trouble just to embarrass your one club. I suggest the plot is far more sinister, and that in all probability they have infiltrated many more if not actually *all* the clubs of London!"

Criscroft paled. "No!"

"I fear so. However, the game is early on and there still may be time to scotch their nefarious plot." He shook his head and stared at the pamphlet once again. "There can be little doubt that this plan is costing them a pretty penny. It would undoubtedly, therefore, help to know the source of their finances."

"Raffle tickets?" I suggested helpfully.

He shook his head a trifle impatiently. "No, no, Watney! A plan this costly would not depend upon anything as uncertain as the proceeds of a raffle. Besides, what would they use as a prize? They are already using all standard items as part of their scheme."

Homes came to his feet. "No, the answer must lie, at least in part, with this steward, Sean O'Callahan. If you will permit me to change to more suitable raiment, I should like to study this situation at first hand."

For a moment Criscroft looked a trifle upset. "You are not a member, of course," he began, and then shrugged. "If worse comes to worst, I shall just have to tell them you are my brother . . ."

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The Anathema Club, of which Criscroft had the honor to be a member, was an ancient and sturdy edifice located on the edge of Interdit Park, and as I entered the hallowed precincts I felt, as always, a touch of pride in just being British, as well as a wave of fury at the miscreants who dared to jeopardize all that the club stood for with their foul scheme.

Criscroft led the way to the pantry and then excused himself, leaving Homes and me to our own devices. With the briefest of glances about the tiled kitchen, Homes made his way to the small attic room which served the steward as a bedchamber. O'Callahan, it appeared, was out shopping, but two A.I.C. men were there, pretending to dust the furniture, and Homes nodded to them distantly before beginning his search.

From my position near the doorway, I watched as he bent to peer beneath the bed, examined the closet and its contents carefully, studied the dresser drawers in great detail, and then walked over to pick up an open envelope which lay on the top of a small desk in the corner. One of the A.I.C. men interrupted his task, moving closer.

"It's only the morning post," said he with a faint sneer. "We've already gone through it. There is nothing of importance there, Mr. Homes."

Homes acknowledged the statement with a cool nod, but still proceeded to raise the flap of the envelope and withdraw the note contained therein.

A small rectangle of greenish-coloured paper fluttered to the desk as he unfolded the brief note and perused it. His eyes widened as he scanned the lines, and then went instantly to the small bit that had fallen free. It was obvious that only the greatest of effort prevented him from exclaiming aloud.

"Homes!" I cried. "What is it?"

With a warning glance in the direction of the two A.I.C. men, he shook his head meaningfully at me and then quite casually slipped both the note and the small bit of greenish paper into his pocket. "I don't believe there is anything more for us here, Watney," he said, winking at me. "I suggest we return to Bagel Street and take up our investigation in more comfortable surroundings." And he winked at me again.

"Homes!" I exclaimed. "You have something in your eye! Permit me—"

"Later," he said savagely, and strode through the doorway . . .

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It was only as our hansom was rattling across the cobblestones of Upper Regent Street that he allowed himself to relax.

"There is nothing of importance there, Mr. Homes'!" he said with biting mimicry. "The fools! An obvious clew under their noses and all they can think to say is: 'There is nothing of importance there, Mr. Homes'!"

"But, Homes," I said, staring at him anxiously, "what was there of importance?"

"Only this!" he replied, and thrust the note in my direction. I took it and perused it rapidly. Its message was quite succinct. *Sir* (it read): *When last you visited my establishment, you forgot the enclosed.* And it was signed, *The Butcher.* I looked up queryingly.

"But, Homes," I said, "I see nothing of importance here."

"Then you are ready to join the Metropolitan Police and the A.I.C.," he replied acidly. His hand came out to retrieve the note. "The Butcher! That can only be Professor Marty, the most dangerous criminal in all England, and a man who earned the appellation of The Butcher for all too obvious reasons! And you may be sure, Watney, that where Professor Marty is involved, we are dealing with a foe worthy of our mettle!"

"And that little bit of greenish paper that was enclosed?"

"That?" Homes smiled grimly. "Only the answer, I am sure, to the major problem of this entire case—that of their finances!"

"But I do not understand any of this, Homes!" I exclaimed.

"Later," he said, and leaned forward. "Here we are in Bagel Street, and we have much to do if this problem is to be resolved in time."

He thrust a coin at our cabbie and hustled me to the pavement even before our hansom had stopped. I followed him up the stairway to our rooms to find him already dragging two reference volumes from their shelf. He carried them to the table and turned up the lamp. His next move was to carefully remove the small bit of coloured paper from his pocket and place it gently upon the desk top, after which he bent down and began to pore over the opened books, each one page by page. I came to stand beside him, staring down at the small rectangle, and then reached out to pick it up.

"Why, Homes," I exclaimed in disappointment, "it is only a postage stamp. Perforated, I see, and from Ulster Premiums—"

"*Only* a postage stamp, Watney?" He looked at me askance and closed the two reference books with a slap. "Do you realize how rare this stamp is? Not only do Stanley Gibbons and Scott fail to list it, but they fail to list any issue marked Premium for any country at

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all! And pray note the superb mint condition, with the original gum intact, which adds immeasurably to its value! Why, this stamp must be worth a fortune! Five or six of them, released at judicious times on the philatelic market, could easily furnish the funds these miscreants require for their infernal plot."

"But, Homes," I protested, "who could possibly be behind this scheme? Certainly the Professor would not do it out of sheer malice; he must be employed by some group. Who could they possibly be?"

"Ah," said Homes, clasping his hands behind his back and beginning to stride the room. "That is the question! That and, of course, the best way to foil them." He paused a moment, frowning. "As to the people behind this dastardly plot, I am sure the answer lies in that pamphlet, if only I am clever enough to solve it." A grim smile crossed his lips. "As to the best means of stopping these culprits, I believe I already see a rift in that loot." His eyes came up. "Would you do me a favour, Watney?"

"Gladly, Homes," I replied warmly.

"*Then I should like you to visit my brother at his club and arrange* for me to secure a list of all club stewards in the City of London. And haste, I might mention, is of the essence."

"You may count on me, Homes," I began, but he had already fallen back into his chair and was reaching for the small brochure. It was obvious that he had already forgotten my presence. Pausing only long enough to have lunch, I set about my errand.

It was upon my return, as I was mounting the stairs, that I heard a sharp sound that sent me dashing up the remaining steps to burst through the door. It was only Homes smiting himself on the forehead.

"Of course," he muttered bitterly, "I am a fool! The answer was staring me in the face all along!"

"Homes!" I exclaimed, hurrying forward. "What is it?"

"Look," said he, and pointed a quivering finger at the sheet of paper he had been covering with his calculations. "Note this: if you take the letters in the name 'Professor Marty' and if you eliminate all duplication of letters, you will find you have, respectively, the following: P, R, O, F, E, S, M, A, T, and Y. Placing them in alphabetical order, they then come out: A, E, F, M, O, P, R, S, T, and Y."

He stared at me calculatingly, his eyes bright with excitement. "Now, Watney, if we assign a numerical value to these letters, with A as 1 and Z as 26, then note how they come out!" His fingers

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hastily marked the numbers down and he looked up triumphantly. "Watney, they come out 1, 5, 6, 13, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, and 25!"

"Indubitably, Homes," I agreed doubtfully, and stared at him.

He smiled at my puzzled expression. "Let us now apply these numbers to the pages of this pamphlet," he said gently, "and see what items they refer to." His thin fingers began to turn the pages. "Ah, here we are! Page 1 deals with upright pianos, page 5 with tapestries. Page 6 lists various hassocks, page 13 eggbeaters, and page 15 rotisseries. Page 16 illustrates ermines, page 18 bicycles, page 19 emeralds, page 20 a variety of lamps—while page 25 fittingly closes our solution by showing shovels!"

"Really, Homes," I said worriedly, "you should eat at more regular intervals."

He waved this aside. *"The initials of these items, Watney!* They spell *UP THE REBELS!"* He tossed his quill aside and came to his feet. "I knew that name Sean O'Callahan had a foreign ring! I shall be gently surprised if, upon investigation, we do not find it to be of Irish origin! I should have realized from the word Ulster that such a possibility existed!"

He nodded his head in conviction. "Think, Watney! To-morrow is the fiftieth anniversary of the Easter Sunday uprising, and what better revenge could they ask than to attack Britain at its most vital spot—the sanctity of the British club!"

I clasped his hand. "Homes, you have done it again! Only you could have solved the mystery of the brochure in the manner in which you did!" My face fell. "But, even knowing this, how are we to stop this vile and despicable scheme?"

"Ah, Watney," he replied, "that is already attended to. You have a list of the stewards?"

"I do," I said with complete honesty, and handed it over.

"Then to work!" said he, and drew from his desk drawer huge sheets of identical stamps. "I shall stuff these into envelopes, and then you shall address them to the list of stewards."

He noted my baffled expression and laughed, albeit ruefully. "A pity, Watney, but there was no other way! While you were visiting Criscroft I have not been idle. A friend of mine who is a printer hastily arranged for the printing of these perfect facsimiles."

"But, Homes!" I objected. "If one stamp is so valuable, will not this great number allow them even vaster funds for their foul designs?"

"Ah, Watney," he replied, shaking his head sadly. "It is easily seen that you know nothing of philately. Where one stamp is a great

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rarity and worth a fortune, tens of thousands of that same stamp render the entire issue worthless. No, Watney, you may be assured that when these thousands of stamps enter into circulation, the entire scheme will fail!" He patted me on the head and then turned to his desk. "And now to work!"

It was several mornings later that I entered the breakfast room of our quarters, picked up the newspaper, and was just beginning to go through the columns in search of some crime report which might serve as a springboard for Homes's analytical ability when my friend came into the room and seated himself opposite me.

"Ah, Watney," said he, spearing a curry, "do you find anything of interest for two idle investigators in your perusal of the news?"

"Very little, Homes," I replied, scanning the leaders. "I do note a case of bankruptcy at some Coupon Trading Company—whatever they are—but such crimes are probably best left to the solicitors."

"I agree," he said, reaching for the cream.

"Although," I added, reading further, "I do note that the president of the company blames his misfortune on something he calls forgery."

"Forgery?" Homes sat erect. "A dire crime, Watney! And one which no true Englishman will warrant! A note to the authorities offering my services, if you please!"

POSTSCRIPT: Criscroft Homes was kind enough to help me prepare this particular adventure for publication, and in the course of proofreading the cover of the infamous brochure for Ulster Premiums he suddenly paused with a frown.

"I note, Watney," said he, looking up at me, "that further along in this tale you make the statement that only Schlock could have solved this case in the *manner* in which he did."

"That's true," I admitted. "Why?"

He pointed to the booklet cover. "Because," he said, smiling at me proudly, "you were quite correct!"

I am always pleased to be the recipient of a compliment, especially one coming from Criscroft, although in this case I have no idea of why he so flattered me.

Dr. W.

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Editor's Note to "The Perforated Ulster": We had no more of an eagle-eye than good old Schlock. The acrostic on the brochure cover—the message spelled out by the initials of all the words—slipped past our imperceptive eyes as blithely as it slipped past Schlock's. Ah, Watney, we salute your obtuseness; pray move over and hand us the dunce cap.

DOUBLE ENTRY

by ROBERT L. FISH

"I don't like it," George Morton said stubbornly.

There was something almost petulant in his tone, like that of a child being driven to a task against his will. He was a middle-aged, nondescript, balding man, growing to fat. His wrinkled suit bagged at the ankles, bunched itself across his stomach, straining the buttons. He turned from his position near the windows of the swank apartment where he had been staring morosely down at the snow-covered meadows of Central Park and walked over to the small bar that furnished one corner of the elegant room. He seated himself on one of the stools, frowned across the counter at his host, and repeated: "I don't like it."

His words made no visible impression on the other. Jerry Reed was a tall dapper man with a hairline moustache and an almost military haircut. He continued to carefully measure gin and vermouth into the ice-filled pitcher and then to stir it even more carefully. He slowly decanted the contents into a tall stemmed glass and smiled. It was a faintly sardonic smile. "Who said you had to like it?" Jerry poured a glass of beer for his guest and pushed it across the bar together with a bottle of bourbon. A two-ounce shotglass was added to the collection. "Who ever said you had to like any of them?"

He picked up his martini and carried it to the coffee table, lowering himself into an easy chair and holding his drink protectively as he sat. His eyes came up to the face of the man at the bar and he raised his glass slightly. "Cheers."

"Cheers." Morton poured himself a shot of bourbon, downed it, then sipped at his beer.

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"Now, then," Jerry said briskly, leaning forward and setting his partially emptied glass on a coaster on the table, "why don't you like it?"

"I never killed a woman before."

Jerry sighed. When he spoke, his voice had lost its amusement, had turned flat. "When they're dead, they're not men or women any more. They're just bodies. Sexless. Clay. Mud. And you've seen enough of them. And produced enough of them."

"But I never hit a woman before."

"So this time it's a woman. She won't be any less dead for that. Or any deader, either." Reed studied the other man emotionlessly. "You like the money, don't you?"

"Of course I like the money."

"And your wife doesn't think all that nice spendable money just comes from your so-called job as a bookkeeper, does she?"

"My wife doesn't know about the money," Morton said, and reached for the bottle, pouring himself another drink. "I don't even lay out all the dough I earn at the office. She thinks we're broke and I let her think so." His voice was emotionless. "If she knew how much money we really have, I'd never get another minute's peace. When it's time for me to retire, she'll know."

Reed smiled, pleased to allow the subject to drift from the assignment, satisfied to wait until Morton was in the proper mood. "That's smart. Keep them barefoot, ignorant, and pregnant, I always say."

"Janie never could get pregnant," Morton said absently, and shrugged. "I don't mind. I'm too old to stand the noise of kids, anyway, I guess."

"And how does she feel about your drinking?"

"She doesn't know about that, either. And she better not." The second drink had brought a touch of truculence into the heavy man's voice. Jerry watched him calmly as the glass on the countertop was replenished for the third time and then allowed to sit. Morton always followed the same pattern: the third drink, when finally taken, would eliminate the hostility, bring him back to normal. And Jerry Reed knew from long experience that the alcohol was not to build up false courage. Morton was the best there was. It was simply habit.

"I chew some gum and suck on some drops I've got before I go home," George said, and dismissed the subject, getting back to another statement of Reed's that his present mood rejected. "And don't call it any 'so-called bookkeeping job.' We hire accountants, not

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bookkeepers. And I'm the assistant office manager down there. It's a real enough job, all right."

"You're also a professional killer," Reed reminded him gently. "Working for me." He smiled, continuing to avoid the subject of Morton's next hit, still waiting for the proper mood to be established. The third drink would do it. The dapper man's tone was idle. "How do you manage to get those afternoons off when you have a job to do?"

Morton shrugged. "The place is owned by my brother-in-law. He probably thinks I'm sneaking out for a dame." He shook his head. "He doesn't care. He only thinks I'm doing it. I know *he* is." He took his last drink.

"And you never do?"

"As a matter of fact, I don't." The third drink was already working. Morton smiled. "One woman gives me all the grief I need."

He finished the beer, pushed both glasses from him, and swung about on the stool, facing Reed. The last drink had acted as usual; he seemed calm, thoughtful, almost detached.

Jerry stared at him curiously. "So if your wife gives you grief, and she doesn't know about the money, why not just do a disappearing act? In a town this size you could do it right here and still keep doing jobs for me."

"Oh, Janie isn't so bad," Morton said, and then added patiently, "Besides, I told you. I like the job. Old Thomason—he's the office manager now—isn't going to last forever. Two, three years and I ought to be holding down his job."

Jerry Reed studied the fleshy face a moment. It certainly took all kinds! Yet he knew that no professional gun in New York City could hold a candle to Morton. Nor did any other command—and get—as high a fee. He shrugged.

"About the hit—"

Morton was ready. He relaxed against the bar. "Yes?"

"It's Marcia Collingswood."

"What?" Morton sat straighter, surprised. "But why—" He cut the question off as soon as he started it; only his amazement had made him begin to ask it in the first place. The whys were not his department. "The movie actress? I didn't even know she was in town."

"Well, she is. She's staying at the Hotel Belleville. Room 509."

Morton snorted. "The Belleville? You've got to be kidding. That fleatrap? Kept dames, quick rentals, and floating crap games—I

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know the place. That's where I hit Quinleven just last month, remember?"

"I remember," Reed said drily. "Anyway, that's where she's staying. Incognito."

Morton considered this. "So," he said at last, simply. "Incognito. Except everybody in the world seems to know where she is."

"Nobody knows where she is. Except you, me, and the man who's paying his good money for the job."

"The Belleville, eh?" Morton considered, then nodded slowly. "Fifth floor. Well, that shouldn't be any great chore. When does the curtain go up?"

"Tomorrow evening, between five and six," Reed said.

"Between five and six?" Morton shook his head decisively. "We're doing our annual audit today and tomorrow. I took this afternoon off to come up here and see you, but I told my brother-in-law I'd stay late tomorrow to make up for it. I ask him for tomorrow off, even one minute, and he's going to scream bloody murder." His tone became accusing. "I've just been telling you I've got a job I like and I'd rather not get canned, if you don't mind."

"Tomorrow evening," Reed said with no change in his voice. "Between five and six. She's meeting somebody for cocktails and dinner at seven—or at least she thinks she is—and she's scheduled to fly back to the Coast on a midnight flight. But she'll be in her room between five and six, and expecting a caller." He studied Morton calmly. "There'll be a bonus for this one."

The heavy man sighed unhappily. "I'll have to say I'm sick, which means I can't even go back to the office afterward. Which means I'll not only miss the time at the office, but I'll have to catch the seven o'clock train to Jersey. Which also means I miss the bus, and either wait half an hour or walk. In all this snow—"

"Tough," Reed said evenly and came to his feet, indicating the conference was over. He stood while Morton climbed down from the stool, and walked him to the door, waiting while the heavy-set man struggled into his overcoat.

"Marcia Collingswood," Reed said. "Hotel Belleville, Room 509. Between five and six." He didn't give the name under which she was registered. Morton would know her by sight. Actually, the repetition was merely force of habit; George Morton, he knew, had the information stored unforgettably in his mind. He smiled at the heavy man in friendly fashion. "If you make it close enough to five, you might still catch your regular train."

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"Not a chance," Morton said mournfully, and opened the apartment door. "You ever try to get a cab up near the Belleville at that hour? Even in good weather? Not a hope." He shook his head dispiritedly and closed the door behind him.

George Morton glanced at his watch and nodded. The smoke-filled bar a block down from the Belleville was infinitely more comfortable than the freezing weather outside—the bar was too warm, in fact, since he was standing, one foot on the rail, still wearing his overcoat. But then, he wasn't being paid to be comfortable. He picked up the small change before him, finished his beer, and moved to the door.

It had begun to sleet heavily when he emerged. Morton smiled faintly. Good! True, he would have greater trouble getting to the station afterward, but at least in this kind of weather heads were bent against the driving wind, eyes buried in coat collars, minds preoccupied with their owners' discomfort rather than the faces of strangers. And, too, the Belleville suited his purpose better than any other hotel he knew. Privacy being the sole reason for the hotel's continued existence, and hence prosperity, the lobby and desk were around a corner from the entranceway, and both the staircase and self-service elevator could be reached without a person necessarily being seen.

Morton paused before the entrance, under the canopy flapping in the icy wind, and glanced through the heavy glass of the swinging doors. The immediate vicinity of the elevator was deserted. The door of the small cab was open, electrically awaiting custom; the light streaming obliquely from it added to the weaker illumination of the corridor.

Morton nodded in satisfaction, pushed through into the area, and stepped quite routinely into the empty elevator, pushing the button for the sixth floor. If one considered walking a flight a necessary precaution, George preferred it to be down rather than up.

The door slid shut and the cab slowly began its whining climb. Morton removed his gloves, opened his overcoat, and brought out a revolver from one jacket pocket and a silencer from another. He carefully screwed the silencer into place, stuffed the lethal assembly into his overcoat pocket, then pulled one glove on. His bare hand was placed into the pocket over the gun, hiding its projection. It made one side of his coat bulge suspiciously, but he knew that the only person who might possibly notice would be in no condition to report it.

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At the sixth floor, the elevator paused, considered, and then allowed its doors to slide jerkily open. Morton stepped out quite naturally, moving down the hallway with assurance. There was nobody to be seen. From behind most of the doors there was an almost watchful silence, but he didn't allow this to disturb him in the least. The other rooms projected muffled music from cheap radios.

Morton pushed beneath the red light illuminating the entrance to the stairway and trotted down the uncarpeted stairs, his face calm and assured. He paused at the fifth-floor landing, glancing through the small glass window set in the upper part of the door.

Like the sixth floor, the fifth was also deserted. He wasn't particularly surprised, nor did he allow it to detain him. With a nod, he thrust the door aside and walked with confidence to the door marked 509, rapping on it evenly, loud enough but not too loud, with aplomb. Confidence was everything. It removed suspicion from his victims until it was too late. It added to his anonymity in case he was ever noticed. Confidence, but not overconfidence.

The door opened. Instantly he recognized the woman facing him, although in person, without makeup, she appeared much older than her publicity photographs.

He spoke quickly, before she could recover from her evident surprise at the strange face. "Miss Collingswood? I'm from the *Daily News*. Chamberly is my name. We heard that you—"

The surprise and disappointment had disappeared; her face had turned hard. "You heard what? What are you doing here? If I wanted to see reporters, I wouldn't be staying at this—this—"

She clamped her jaws shut, starting to close the door. It caught on his heavy shoe, wedged in the opening.

Morton was extremely apologetic. The important thing was that nobody appear from another room or from the elevator before he gained entrance. "Look, Miss Collingswood, we're a newspaper. I've got an editor who eats reporters alive. When a good story breaks—"

"Take your foot out of the door. Do you hear?" Her white face studied his for a moment and seemed to see something in it. She came to a decision. "If you don't, I'm going to call the desk and have them send a policeman up here. And if you print one word about my being here, I'll deny it and sue your newspaper for more money than it's got. Do you hear? Is that clear?"

The foot remained. "Look, Miss Collingswood—"

But the girl had had enough. She marched to the small table beside the bed, swinging about to hide the sight of him, reaching

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for the telephone. Morton stepped inside, closing the door quickly behind him. Her hand didn't have time to raise the receiver; he shot her through the nape of the neck, and then once more, slightly higher, even as the body was crumbling helplessly to the bed. The only sounds were the diffident coughs of the silencer.

Morton unscrewed the silencer, put the gun in one jacket pocket and the silencer in the other, and walked to the door, pressing his ear against the thin panel. He didn't even look back.

He could hear no voices. He straightened up, buttoning his overcoat, slipping on the other glove. He opened the door slowly, calmly, walking out and carelessly closing it behind him. The elevator was in use, the pointer moving. He walked to the stairway, backing into the door to open it, and then trotted down the steps.

The entranceway was empty when he made the last turn at the final landing and descended to the street level. He stared through the glass with a frown. The sleet had stopped beating down, but the hazards of walking were evident in the figures lurching past. The seven o'clock train? He'd probably be lucky to make the eight o'clock!

He pulled his coat collar up over his ears and pushed his way to the street. A thin figure, face hooded in a fur collar, hunched in the protection of the doorway, partially blocking his passage. He pushed past and then heard the familiar voice.

"Hello, George."

He swung about, staring, and then smiled in unbelieving amazement. Whatever had brought Janie to the city that day, she couldn't have picked a better time, because no matter where she went Janie always drove. So she'd have the car and, slippery or not, a car was always better than walking. His smile suddenly faded. Janie? Here?

"Janie! What are you doing here?" A further question came to him, disturbing, inexplicable. "And how did you know where I was?"

"Because I followed you here about a month ago when I called you at the office and my brother said you were going to be away for the afternoon." Her voice was spiteful, scathing. "I followed you from the office when you left. And when I called to talk to you today and my brother told me he was fed up with your taking time off, I knew where you were. Do you understand? *I knew.*"

She stared up at him, her thin face almost wolfish. "I know what kind of hotel this is. You think I'm a fool, but I know what goes on here—"

"But you don't understand, Janie—"

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She fumbled in her purse as for a handkerchief and her hand emerged with a small gun. Morton stared at her incredulously. She raised the weapon evenly.

"I said I know what kind of hotel this is."

Her words were soft although half strangled, punctuated by the sharp splat of the gun. Morton's eyes had widened in amazement at the sight of the weapon; now they suddenly squeezed closed.

Two bullets drove him back inexorably, relentlessly. He struck the glass doors leading into the hotel as if in relief for their support, collapsing, sliding slowly down to the small step before the entrance, then leaning sideways as if resting against the doorjamb, lifeless.

She moved to him, bending over the rigid figure with its grotesquely open mouth, oblivious of the tableau of startled spectators frozen in their tracks by the sight, oblivious of the shrill whistle from the corner of the street and the figure of the policeman running toward her, sliding, slipping, oblivious of everything but her all-consuming bitterness and her recognition of her failure as a woman. The revolver dangled from her hand unnoticed, like an admonishing finger, scolding.

"And you've been drinking, too," she said, and suddenly began to cry.

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a ***NEW*** short story by

H. R. F. KEATING

"You are unable to get good vegetables?" Sven Hjerson asked with sudden anxiety. "In Rome I was in a similar predicament. But I had heard that in the South things are better."

"Oh, the vegetables are all right, I suppose. It's no porridge at breakfast that gets my goat," Arabella Buckley complained. "Coffee and rolls. What nonsense."

"Then you think on Capri I shall be obtaining good vegetables?" the detective inquired. "You see, they are so important for the uttermost functioning of the brain."

Another thinly veiled detective spoof from H. R. F. Keating, whose latest Inspector Ghote novel, The Iciest Sin, *was published in December by Mysterious Press . . .*

JACK FELL DOWN

by H. R. F. KEATING

"'Twas on the Isle of Capree that I found her . . . "

Blithely ignoring the rocking of the little steamer in the lurching Mediterranean swell, the girl with the sun-catching cap of peroxided hair sitting hatless on the wooden bench right in the vessel's prow lifted her voice in sudden bubbling song. A blurred blueness in the distance, Capri indeed was the little wallowing tub's destination.

"Really!" exclaimed in heavily scandalized tones one of the few other passengers braving the last gusts of a salt-laden sirocco up on deck, an Englishwoman in an ample frock loud with different-colored daisies. But, finding her exclamation had produced no reaction in the only other passenger not comfortably below—except in the stern

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for a scatter of peasants returning with emptied baskets from Naples—she moved nearer along the ship's greasy rail.

Her target was an excessively tall gangling gentleman, not very suitably clad for the Mediterranean in a suit of gingery wool with the trousers ending in tight bands round the calves. He was leaning against the rail smoking a cigarette and staring with an air of melancholy toward the distant island.

"Not a very ladylike performance," the ample, beflowered lady pronounced with a look of pinched disapproval in the direction of the girl in the prow.

Briefly lifting his cap, the ginger giant produced, in foreign-accented English, a decidedly noncommittal reply.

The large lady was not to be put off, however.

"Tell me," she said, leaning forward with a smile at once coy and overwhelming, "I must know. Are you Mr. Sven Hjerson, the famous Finnish detective? I mean, you must be. I saw your picture in the paper here just last week. You've been helping the Vatican in some mysterious business or other, haven't you?"

"Well, madam, I must make some congratulations to you. You have, as they are saying, done a fine observation."

"Knew I was right. Generally am. Buckley's the name. Arabella Buckley. Miss. You on another case, eh? The Corpse on Capri, ha?"

"No, no," Sven Hjerson was quick to reply. "It is just that after much brainwork in Rome I have thought to give myself a little holiday on this famous Capri Island."

"Sight too famous nowadays, if you ask me," Arabella Buckley pronounced. "All the fault of that dreadful song. How that girl can bring herself to sit there singing it I can't imagine. You know who she is, don't you?"

"No, I have not such pleasure. And, madam, I would—"

"She goes by the name of Jilly Jonathan. She's one of those—what-d'-you-call-'ems—stars. A star of the screen."

"The cinema is not a place I am very much attending."

"No, nor me. Frightfully vulgar. But one gets to know about these people somehow. Well, I suppose in the case in point—" Miss Buckley directed a vigorous glare toward Jilly Jonathan, face lifted to the sun, cheerfully caroling the sentimentally sad words of the song. "Engaged to the Earl of Woodleigh, you know. They announced it just a couple of weeks ago. On holiday out here with him now. Excelsior Hotel in Naples."

"And it is there that you also are staying?"

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"No—can't afford a place like that. Simple pensione for me. Appalling Italian food, of course, but beggars can't be choosers, what?"

"You are unable to get good vegetables?" Sven Hjerson asked with sudden anxiety. "In Rome I was in the similar predicament. But I had heard that in the South things are better."

"Oh, the vegetables are all right, I suppose. It's no porridge at breakfast that gets my goat. Coffee and rolls. What nonsense."

"Then you think that on Capri I shall be obtaining good vegetables?" the detective inquired. "You see, they are so important for the uttermost functioning of the brain."

"Well, never stayed on the island myself. Just visited it once. Last Sunday, as a matter of fact. Same day as Lord Woodleigh and that—and his fiancee."

"They are traveling together, just themselves?" Sven Hjerson asked with a sudden flicker of interest.

"Oh, no. Good gracious me, no. Woodleigh's too much of a gentleman, of course, for anything like that. Though I dare say she— No, there's a whole party of them. Woodleigh, the girl, the Honorable Peter Horbury, and Mrs. Lettice Horbury. He's Woodleigh's cousin, and his heir, of course, unless that's the older Horbury brother who ran off to Australia years ago and has never been heard of since. And then Woodleigh's secretary even came out last week, so I gather. Some trouble at home, and he sent for her. No, whole thing's perfectly above board."

"You are most well informed, madam," Sven Hjerson said, a little drily.

"Oh, well, you know how it is. Interesting people and all that."

At the prow, Jilly Jonathan abruptly stopped singing and jumped to her feet. She made her way, still seemingly dancing to the tune, the huge crocodile-skin handbag on her arm swaying heavily in time, to the door down to the saloon. Hauling it open, she thrust in her peroxided head and called out something.

A moment or two later, a man who could only be—from his lanky form and fine-boned features—her fiance, Lord Woodleigh, emerged, evidently doing his best to overcome a certain reluctance.

"Darling," Jilly Jonathan said, her voice ringing out for all to hear, "don't fug away down there. It's super up in the sun. And, look, Capree's getting nearer and nearer."

"Capri, old girl," Lord Woodleigh said, giving the name its Italian rather than its popular-song emphasis.

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"Oh, what's it matter how you say it? The thing is, it's there. And this time we're really going to get to see the Blue Grotto. You can't go to your stuffy old church today. Not when it's not Sunday."

Lord Woodleigh smiled at her, plainly overcoming a natural reticence.

"Oh, my dear," he said, "you'll really have to get used to me going to Mass. Every Sunday, without fail. And on Holy Days of Obligation, too."

"Well, okay. But this isn't a what-did-you-call-it, it's a real holiday. Time to do as you like. And fancy telling me that there was an interesting stoup in that old church on the island."

"It's what the guidebook said, my darling."

"Yes, but I thought it must be some arch or something that everybody had to stoop to go through. I didn't even think that would be very interesting, but I liked the idea of old Peter having to bend himself for once."

"Now, you're not to make fun of Peter. He's always been a bit on his dignity, I suppose, but that's the way he is. Comes of half expecting to inherit the title and half not, I daresay."

Jilly Jonathan gave a quick little frown. "I think actually," she said, "he's terribly jealous."

"Jealous?"

"Of me, darling. After all, I came along when he must have thought you were safe to be a bachelor forever and ever, and now he'll never be a lord and everything."

"Well, that will depend on whether we have children, angel. If we don't, although now you get the estate, you can't, of course, inherit the title."

"But I would still be a lady, wouldn't I?"

Lord Woodleigh's long ascetic face broke into another ice-cracked smile. "Yes, my dear. From the moment we're married, you'll be Countess of Woodleigh."

"And if you—well, if you were to sort of pop off, I'd go on being a countess, wouldn't I? And shouldn't it be an earless, anyhow? And, darling, don't pop off, will you? Ever? Ever?"

Again, Lord Woodleigh smiled. Almost grinned. "Haven't I told you a dozen times, at least? The wife of an earl is a countess, and if that earl dies his wife becomes the Dowager Lady Blank. It's really quite simple."

"But, sweetie pie, I am—what's it you keep saying?—a bear of very little brain."

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"But a very nice little bear all the same."

"Brazen hussy."

Arabella Buckley hissed out the words, but Sven Hjerson thought it very likely they had been carried by the sticky breeze as far as the couple in the prow.

He was unable to observe, however—as he would have liked to have done in his ever-observant way—just what the expression on Jilly Jonathan's pretty face might have been.

At that moment, emerging from the saloon below as if propelled from a circus cannon, there appeared a distinctly grotesque figure. He was, beyond doubt, an Italian, swarthy in complexion, crowned under a battered panama with a mop of grease-shining black curls, plump with much pasta. But he had chosen to dress in what he may have conceived to be a British manner. He wore a blazer, not unlike the one Lord Woodleigh wore except that instead of discreet brass buttons it was decorated by no fewer than five enormous, tinselly affairs. In place of the modest flannel bags Lord Woodleigh had on, this fellow had a pair of white trousers, much too short for him, stained heavily on one side and showing beneath a pair of socks in a hideous approximation to a Scottish tartan. These eventually were mercifully lost in brown-and-white "correspondent" shoes.

"Milord, milord!" he shouted, hurling himself toward the pair in the prow. "Milord, you are, yes, yes, yes, wanting hotel on Capri? Yourself and the pretty, pretty lady, yes? One bedroom only. Yes, yes, yes?"

Lord Woodleigh gave him a look that would have quelled in an instant any insolent groom or keeper. "Certainly not," he said. "Go away."

He might have been obeyed except that Jilly Jonathan burst into unstoppable giggles. "Oh, Jack," she managed at last, "do let's take up the offer. If only as a joke, to tell people at home when we get back."

"No, really—it would hardly be a joke in very good taste."

"Oh, milord, milord. Make that very good joke, yes? Very good joke. One room only. Very, very pretty lady."

Now something more than a quelling look appeared on Lord Woodleigh's fine-bred features. Cold anger.

"Listen, my man," he said, "the guidebook warned us about hotel

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touts of your sort, and unless you make yourself scarce I shall put you into the hands of the Carabinieri."

The threat was enough. More than enough. The tartan-socked tout positively scuttled his way to the vessel's stern.

By the time the boat reached the island, Sven Hjerson had still not succeeeded in shaking off the ample, daisies-sprinkled form of Arabella Buckley. From the yet more gloomy expression on his normally lugubrious face, it was evident that he had resigned himself to her companionship at least as far as his hotel perched up far above the sea.

So it was without surprise that he found himself sharing with her one of the tinny open-sided cars of the creaky old funicular that saved tourists the toil of climbing the seven hundred and more steep stone steps up from the Marina Grande.

As soon as the linked train of little open cars began its steeply angled ascent, she clutched the Finnish detective by the arm. "Mr. Hjerson," she gasped, "did you notice?"

"It is my business always to make notices. But, alas, madam, I do not in the present know what it is you are asking if I am seeing."

"That Italian. That what-d'you-call-'em. Tout. He's on the funicular with us—in the next car, with Miss Abernethie."

"Miss Abernethie? She is the lady I have seen? Very middle-age, hair grey, clothes most plain, pince-nez spectacles, expression always disapproving? Lord Woodleigh's secretary he has sent for?"

"Yes, yes—that's her. But don't you understand about that—that tout?"

"Madam, what should be understood?"

"Why, that he's here because of Jilly Jonathan. He's trying to lay his filthy hands on her, I haven't a doubt. And perhaps she— You must have seen how struck he was with her. 'Very, very pretty lady,' all that sort of beastly foreign stuff."

"Well, but, madam, if the fellow is a tout—tout, is that the word?—for one of the hotels here, is it not likely he would need to be ascending like us?"

"Ah, no—you see, no. The thing is that it costs forty lira to go up now, but if he had waited just one hour more, till the eleven A.M. departure, he would have had to pay only two lira. It said so in the guidebook."

The Finn considered. "Yes, madam," he said at last, "I am granting that his conducting of himself is not what might be expected. But,

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you know, there may be many other reasons why it is important for him to get to the top so quickly. It does not have to be that he has conceived what the French are calling the *coup de foudre* for Miss Jonathan."

"You can tell that," said Arabella Buckley, "to the Marines."

It was an exclamation she might have had to clarify. But at that moment their creaking conveyance gave a sudden fearsome jerk and came to a dead stop.

Once again Miss Buckley clutched Sven Hjerson's arm. "I knew it wasn't safe," she jabbered. "I knew it the moment I saw it last Sunday. These Italians, you can't trust them, you know. Certainly not with anything mechanical. That's something you've got to be the sturdy British workman to understand."

Sven Hjerson's lugubrious face lit up in a brief smile. "Then I am able to give you a reassurance, madam," he said. "This funicular is looked after by an Englishman. You can rely upon the observations of Sven Hjerson for this. I noted him working on the machinery while we were waiting to ascend. He was dropping one of his tools and let forth a number of obscenities. His voice was what is called, I am understanding, Cockney or perhaps Australian."

"Yes," said Arabella Buckley. "Yes, well, that is reassuring. Only—"

"Yes?"

"Well, if he was repairing the machinery, it can't have been safe in the first place, can it?"

Then Sven Hjerson took his revenge for the past tiresome two hours. "Madam," he said, "you are right. We cannot be certain. Definitely not."

His mischievous words, however, were to prove within a very few minutes appallingly prescient.

The funicular had resumed its climb, apparently smoothly enough. Arabella Buckley had released her grip on the Finn's long ginger-suited arm—perhaps with some reluctance. They sat in silence then, looking out to either side at the steeply tumbling rocks interspersed with dry, hard Mediterranean shrubs.

But, almost at the end of the ascent, there came a new series of alarming jerks and they juddered to a halt once more. At once there came, clear in the sunny air, a long, piercing scream.

The tall Finnish detective acted with a turn of speed altogether surprising to Miss Buckley. In an instant, he had vaulted over the side of their car and had begun swinging himself along toward the

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head of the train and the car occupied by Lord Woodleigh and Jilly Jonathan.

They were no longer in it.

The side of the car opposite the landing stage, rustily flimsy at best, had fallen or been pushed away, leaving a jagged edge all round. Sven Hjerson clambered aboard and cautiously peered over.

"Nothing!" he called out at once to reassure the others whose view of the top car was obscured by the tall backs of their seats. "But one cannot see greatly far down. Perhaps they are well. It is not so long till some bushes are there. I see to the side a railing also. Perhaps it has stopped their descent, I cannot make out."

The remaining passengers—there were not many of them—had in the meanwhile managed to make their way, scrambling from the outside of one car to the next to the safety of the solid wooden landing stage. They stood there in a frightened cluster.

"I am going to make the climb downward!" the Finn called to them. "Help will be needed! Would some gentleman like to assist me?"

"Yes, yes. Let me. I'm his cousin, Peter Horbury!"

The Honorable Peter Horbury appeared to be some ten or twelve years younger than the earl. There were traces of the same fine-boned look about him, but his features were already well masked by what was likely in the course of time to become a fine layer of self-indulgent fat.

Nevertheless, he seemed willing enough to accompany the Finnish detective in the dangerous climb down over the tumbling rocks to where his cousin and his cousin's pretty, peroxided fiancee lay. Perhaps dead. Perhaps, taking into account the comparative shortness of the descent, only injured.

In the event, it took the two of them, scrambling and sliding downward beside each other, faces to the rocks, only some five or six minutes to reach the spot where the railing which Sven Hjerson had noticed further along had in fact stopped the couple's fall.

But it had stopped Lord Woodleigh in the most horrible of ways.

His head must have fallen almost directly on top of one of the tall spikes that surmounted the old iron rail. He had not been impaled, but the spikes had been driven far upward from near his throat before his body had slumped clear. There could be no doubt at all that he was dead.

Jilly Jonathan had been luckier, or less appallingly unlucky. She

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was lying not far from her fiance, eyes closed, deathly pale but apparently hardly injured. The tall Finn and Peter Horbury together raised her up and in a moment or two her eyelids fluttered open.

With unexpected tenderness, Sven Hjerson told her what had happened.

"Oh, my God, my God," she said. "I was showing Jack the view out there, and I leaned over, pointing to something, and then suddenly the whole thing seemed to tilt and—"

She broke off and Sven Hjerson felt her body slump again in his arms. But by the time he had gathered up her handbag and Lord Woodleigh's camera, which had come to rest nearby, she was able slowly to make her way with them to the nearest point where the accident could be reported.

Some two hours later, the whole party sat, exhausted and silent, in deckchairs on the terrace of Sven Hjerson's hotel, sipping half heartedly at cups of abominable tea and looking without seeing anything at the wide sweep of the Bay of Naples spread out far below them.

Jilly Jonathan was pale but had calmed down after the bout of hysterical weeping that had overcome her once they had got her to the hotel. Peter Horbury sat beside her, still looking tousled from his exertions among the rocks. Next to him, his wife, a tall rangy woman who Sven Hjerson somehow saw even here as being astride a hunter, was leaning forward, tapping the tips of the fingers of each hand one against the other. Beside her, chair drawn a little back, Miss Abernethie sat, her face rigid with disapproval, though of what precisely there was no telling. And, to Sven Hjerson's concealed annoyance, Miss Arabella Buckley had contrived to make herself one of the group, her ample form straining the faded green canvas of a chair firmly set among the others.

Into the Finn's head there had strayed, not to be expelled, the words of an English nursery rhyme that a child had once recited to him. "Jack and Jill went up the hill to fetch a pail of water, Jack fell down and broke his crown and Jill came tumbling after." The childish words went through and through his mind, blotting out all coherent thought. And he felt, obscurely, that the terrible accident needed to be given coherent thought. As much and as deep coherent thought as he was capable of. But it had been days since he had managed to obtain a good, large dish of fresh-cooked vegetables. His famous brain was stupified.

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Perhaps this was why, uncharacteristically, he burst out aloud with the thought that at last chased the nursery rhyme momentarily from his mind.

"No. No, no. That car could not have tipped over of itself. Jack and Jill went up the hill, yes, and Jack fell down with Jill tumbling after also. But it was in no manner a simple fall. There must have been a push."

Arabella Buckley was the first to recover from the shock of that strange outpouring.

"Mr. Hjerson," she said, "are you—well, are you sure? I mean, don't you—well, don't you sometimes expect to find mysterious deaths wherever you go?"

Sven Hjerson nodded slowly. "Yes," he said. "Yes, that is a good supposition you have made, madam. I would not have thought you—But, no. No, it is not right. Sven Hjerson is always making observations. He has trained the eyes to do it. I was telling you, was I not, that I was seeing with exactness what that English workman was doing while we were waiting to ascend? I know how the funicular is operating. Exactly. And I am repeating, Jack and Jill did not tumble down the hill without somebody giving a push."

"But—" Peter Horbury brought out "—but that means—well, that means—"

"Murder, Peter," his wife snapped, leaning forward in the saddle. "That's what Mr. Hjerson has the effrontery to be claiming has happened."

"Madam, there is no effrontery. Yes, Lord Woodleigh has been murdered, and Miss Jilly Jonathan has been a victim beside him. Sven Hjerson has said it."

"In which case," Arabella Buckley pronounced sturdily, "there's only one thing for it. The what-d'-you-call-'ems. The police. The Carabin-somethings."

It was perhaps an hour later that the island's police chief left them with a clicking-heels bow. Despite his almost complete lack of English and the poor Italian the others possessed, several things had emerged.

Only a handful of people, it had been established, were near enough to the leading car of the funicular for it to have been possible to have given it the fatal extra push that had sent Lord Woodleigh and Jilly Jonathan tumbling down the steep hillside. These were Peter Horbury and his wife, who had been in the little car imme-

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diately next to Lord Woodleigh's, and Miss Abernethie, who had in the next car been suffering the presence of the tartan-socked hotel tout. "I am afraid I took pains to look out the other side so as not to see him," she had said. "But he was there. He was very definitely there."

"So it could have been him who slipped over the side and did it," Arabella Buckley had promptly declared.

"Yes," Sven Hjerson had been constrained to agree, "it would have been possible for him, I think. Just possible."

He had given Arabella Buckley a quick glance then. "Just as it might have been possible for you also, madam," he had said. "I, too, was regarding the view on the opposite side from yourself. I could not in the court of law swear that you had been under my observations the whole time we were making the ascent."

But the others, with the abominable tout in their sights, had been quick to fix the blame on him. The Carabinieri chief had left at once with a promise of finding the man within the hour, to which he added sotto voce a pledge to get the truth out of him by whatever methods might be necessary.

Sven Hjerson was not, however, willing to let this convenient solution put an end to his own investigation.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said when the police chief's hurrying back was out of sight, "let us not make ourselves deceived. Is it so likely that that man, however much he may have been struck by your beauty and gaiety, Miss Jonathan, would have at once decided to assassinate your husband?"

But Arabella Buckley, with a murderer who was not "one of us" almost under her thumb, was not going to let him go so easily. "Dash it all," she said, "Lord Woodleigh spoke very sharply to the fellow when we were on the boat. And these Italians are fearfully hot-headed. Everybody knows what foreigners are like."

There was a chorus of agreement. It served to make the Finnish detective rather sharper than he might otherwise have been.

"No," he said. "Let us please seek for more stronger motives."

Round the semicircle of chairs, quick looks flicked from face to face.

"Yes," Sven Hjerson went on, "it is a fact, I am thinking, that all those people who might have given that not very well balanced car the one push needed have also possible reasons for wishing the death of Lord Woodleigh. And of you also, Miss Jonathan." He gave Jilly Jonathan a brief bow from his enormous gangling height.

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"Well, I say, that's a bit rich, don't you know," Peter Horbury said.

"Nonsense, Peter," his wife pounced down on him as if he were a hound that had misbehaved, "the man's quite right. You've got a perfect motive. After all, you're the Earl of Woodleigh now."

"Good lord, so I am." For a moment or two, Peter Horbury contemplated his newly elevated status. "But, I mean to say, I did always think I would inherit one day, with Jack being such a confirmed—" He broke off, blushed, and tried not to look at Jilly Jonathan.

"And you, madam—" Sven Hjerson turned to Peter's wife "—you are now—I heard the belated Lord Woodleigh explaining this myself—you are now Countess of Woodleigh. It is a great honor."

The new Lady Woodleigh looked as if she might take her riding-crop to him if he so much as uttered another word.

"Choose to think that would be a reason for sending old Jack into the next world if you like," she said. "But I'm sure there are others with better reasons for wanting to get rid of him."

"Don't see who you mean," Arabella Buckley said, a blood-red blush rising up in her cheeks. "I mean, I've hardly met any of you, let alone—"

"I am thinking," Sven Hjerson said, "that Lady Woodleigh, the new, is meaning someone else, not you, Miss Buckley." He turned in his chair a little. "I am thinking, Miss Abernethie, she is perhaps wondering, like myself, why you were sent for to Naples in the middle of the new-engaged couple's holiday. Is the trouble at home that I am hearing of, perhaps, that someone had been—what is the expression?—boiling the books?"

"No. No! It's a lie! I haven't— Why should— Oh, you are all so beastly! Beastly!" Miss Abernethie jumped from her chair, scuttled in the direction of the broad flight of steps leading to the road outside, tripped clumsily over Jilly Jonathan's big crocodile-skin handbag, fell to her feet, scrambled up again, pushed the heavy bag aside with a cry of rage that came oddly from her dumpily respectable self, and ran off out of sight.

"Quick, quick, after her somebody!" Arabella Buckley shouted, her prejudice in favor of foreign murderers seemingly suddenly abandoned.

Poor overweight Peter Horbury, the new Lord Woodleigh, began to heave himself from his deckchair and then sank back into it. "Oh, she can't get off the island," he said. "No need to go chasing about."

He turned to Sven Hjerson. "Perhaps, my dear fellow, since you're

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some sort of detective, you'd try to get through on the telephone to the Carabinieri. They should pick her up without any trouble."

But Sven Hjerson appeared not to have heard. He had made no attempt to pursue the fleeing secretary and was sitting as if in a trance, staring somewhere between the chairs occupied by the new Lord Woodleigh and Jilly Jonathan. "Yes," he said eventually. "Yes, Sven Hjerson sees it all. It is nothing so ever to do with that Australian or Cockney mechanic."

"I should jolly well hope you do see it," Lady Woodleigh snapped. "Damn it, the dreadful woman's run off! It should all be quite evident enough by now."

"No, no," the Finnish detective said, shaking his head as if to rid himself of the last remnants of misunderstanding. "No, you see, Lady Woodleigh, it was not Miss Abernethie who was responsible for the death of Jack who went up the hill. Perhaps she has boiled some books, but that is another matter altogether. No, the murder of Lord Woodleigh was conceived here on Capri, I am believing. Perhaps because something called a stoup in a church was not so interesting enough as he had thought."

"What on earth," Arabella Buckley said, "has that stoup—I believe it's what Catholics have for holy water at the entrance to their churches—what on earth has that to do with murder?"

"I will tell you. Last Sunday, the belated Lord Woodleigh and Miss Jilly Jonathan could not see the famous Blue Grotto on this island because Lord Woodleigh insisted to go to Mass in a church here. It was this, I am thinking, that made Miss Jonathan realize that if the marriage she was about to enter into with a man much different from herself, and older also, would not go well, she would never from a Catholic be obtaining a divorce. So she decided to make away with him."

"But that's ridiculous!" Arabella Buckley bounced out. "I mean, the girl wasn't even married to him yet. She'll be left with nothing now." She looked across at the film star, not with a great deal of pity. Jilly Jonathan was sitting just as she had been ever since they had come out onto the terrace. Still as a stone.

"No, that is wrong," Sven Hjerson went on in his level, accented tones. "You heard as much as I did, Miss Buckley. On board the steamer, the two of them were talking about what would happen to the title if Lord Woodleigh was to die before they had had any children, and Lord Woodleigh said—Sven Hjerson's ears heard it—*although now you get the estate.* Now, he was saying. And about

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something as important as so much land and money he would speak with correctitude. So he had already made his will, yes, leaving all already to his future wife. That is the motive."

"Well, yes," said Lady Woodleigh. "But that doesn't mean she killed him. She survived the fall down the hill. He might have done, too. Not much worse than a tumble in the hunting field."

"No," Sven Hjerson said, "you have not thought about the wrong handbag."

"What wrong handbag, for heaven's sake? Man's a fool."

"Yes, for some time even Sven Hjerson was a fool. He saw that handbag. He was even carrying it, and thinking how heavy it was. But he was never saying to himself until one moment in the past that it was much peculiar that a girl as pretty and as fashionable with her peroxide hair as Jilly Jonathan was carrying on holiday a big crocodile-skin handbag. He was never saying to himself in that heavy bag what should there be?"

At this, he leapt from his chair in one long gingery streak, seized the bag, and without ceremony upended it.

Out onto the stones of the terrace there fell a thick metal spike, not at all dissimilar to the blood-smeared one on which Lord Woodleigh had not fallen, out of sight for a few vital minutes from anyone looking from above.

"A clear case of premeditated murder, the conception made here last Sunday, the spiky weapon obtained from somewhere, the risk taken," he said. "Once more Sven Hjerson has triumphed. Without also fresh vegetables."

"Q"

Editor's Note: The Finnish sleuth Sven Hjerson is the creation of Agatha Christie's fictional alter ego, the prolific mystery writer Ariadne Oliver. Mrs. Oliver assisted the great Belgian detective Hercule Poirot in five novels, including *Cards on the Table, Dead Man's Folly,* and *Hallowe'en Party*. She appeared sans Poirot in *The Pale Horse,* but Keating's spoof is the first time an adventure of her fictional detective has appeared in print.

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a *NEW* short story by

GEORGE BAXT

"Amanda, this ain't no rerun on the tube," said Joe. "This is real life as you never see it on television. This is a djen-you-wine offer we're making you." He leaned forward and squinted. "You ain't going to pass it up, are you?"

"Hell, no!" said Amanda exuberantly. "This is the best offer I've had since Louis B. Mayer spirited me off to Aguascalientes fifty years ago."

The Norfolk Virginian Pilot *called George Baxt's* The Tallulah Bankhead Murder Case *"a sly mystery by an original satiric voice." His latest in the series from St. Martin's Press is* The Talking Pictures Murder Case. *Go for it . . .*

HEARING VOICES

by GEORGE BAXT

The marriage was working but he wasn't. Bess Baker knew she sounded just like her late mother when she nagged Roy about finding a job, but he'd been unemployed almost a year now and they were barely scraping by on her salary. Selling dresses to rich, spoiled Beverly Hills matrons was not her idea of paradise.

"You can't keep asking your parents to help us out," she reminded him.

"Yes, I can," he countered, "I inherit it all someday."

Bess was at the kitchen sink, peeling potatoes. Roy sat at the table, reading a casting bulletin. She was fighting tears as she said, "What's become of the man I married?"

"Sitting right here," he said through a yawn. "If I work, I can't make the rounds. And if I don't make the rounds, how can I find any acting jobs?"

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"Acting jobs! What acting jobs?"

"Mom and Pop worked all the time when they were sober. Someday I'll be as famous as they were." He flipped a page. "Gee, CBS has a new college series. I'll have to look into that."

"You're too old to be a college student."

"I could be a college teacher."

"Do you really think Joe and Tillie are all that rich?" She loathed her in-laws. They were bigoted rightists and kept reminding Roy he had married beneath him. The Bakers, they relished reminding Roy, were Hollywood aristocracy, two of the highest-paid character actors in the business. They were always watching themselves on television after midnight. Joe the perennial prizefighter's manager, football coach, and gangster's crooked mouthpiece. Tillie the waspish society matron, sadistic prison warden, and tough ranch manager.

"They're rich, all right. They made hundreds of thousands and invested most of it. They own their house, they own our house, they own property in Santa Barbara and Long Beach, they've got stocks and bonds and jewelry and paintings and, oh boy, that's rich all right. Right?"

She was cutting a potato into a pot of boiling water. "Why can't they settle some of it on you now, while we're still young enough to enjoy it?"

"Because they know I'll mismanage it."

Bess turned and stared at her still-boyish husband. "*I* could manage it."

"They don't approve of you."

"Would they give you the money if we got a divorce?"

He looked up sharply. "Is that what you want? You want a divorce?"

"Of course I don't want a divorce, you dummy. But suppose we did. And they gave you a chunk of cash for being a good little boy. Then we could remarry and enjoy it."

"Nice idea. But Joe and Tillie don't give nobody nothing without strings attached. You know they're a pair of shrewdies."

Bess thought, They are but you aren't. Henry Fonda produced Jane and Peter. John Huston gave us Anjelica. The Barrymores went on forever. But Joe and Tillie Baker? Roy, the gutless wonder. Bess wondered if the hospital might have switched babies on her in-laws. Much as she despised them, she had to respect what they had achieved professionally. She had to respect that when she watched them. They were damned good performers, merciless scene stealers.

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Even babies and dogs were no match for them. They'd have strangled the babies and eaten the dogs.

"I'll go up and see them after dinner. I'll have a talk with them. Maybe now that they're on Disulfiram and staying sober, they'll listen to reason. No more of their drunken rages and threats to deport me. Gee, what I used to go through convincing my parents I was born in this country."

Said Bess, "I'll never forget that night your mother threw a knife at me."

"Bad night. Bad miss."

"That's not funny."

"Why don't you come with me?"

"No, thanks, I'd sooner hemorrhage. Dinner's ready as soon as these potatoes boil." She stared out the window above the sink out into the street and its tatty palm trees. She thought of her ambitions ten years ago when she came to Los Angeles from tatty Orlando, Florida. What had her mother said? Out of the fire into the frying pan. She met Roy in acting class. He was Hollywood glamour. His folks were famous and rich.

At first they were pleasant. They invited her to lunch and to parties, where they would end up raging drunk, insulting their guests, using everyone for target practice. Yet few rejected future invitations. What a perfectly dreadful pair, thought Bess. They belonged in the White House.

In their Frank Lloyd Wright palace on Alpine Drive in Beverly Hills, Joe and Tillie Baker sat in the small downstairs living room where they exclusively entertained has-beens. Sitting with them and sharing a pot of tea and biscuits was the never-to-be-forgotten Amanda Cullen who'd been forgotten years ago.

Tillie dumped four teaspoonfuls of sugar into her cup. She needed a lot of sugar since she gave up drinking along with her husband and went on Disulfiram. "Amanda baby, how could you have let it happen?" Amanda sipped her tea. "We were some of the smartest girls in this town—you, me, Kay Francis, Miriam Hopkins. We were the real smart ones."

Amanda offered in a small voice, "Miriam died broke."

"She didn't have to," snapped Tillie. "Ain't I right, Joe?"

"You're always right, Tillie."

"Damn right I'm always right. Well now, listen, Amanda, I didn't invite you up to offer you a handout. We want to offer you a job."

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Amanda brightened considerably. "What kind of job?"

"Be our housekeeper."

Amanda thought for a moment. "I've never played a housekeeper."

"No, and you never played Mary Queen of Scots," snapped Tillie, "or I'd offer to behead you. Listen, lady, you're poverty-stricken. And you're almost seventy years old."

"I'm seventy-one."

"How time flies," said Joe.

"We've got a big house here—much too big for us. We'd sell if we could get the price we want, but nowadays the only people who could afford it are the Japanese and we ain't selling to no slant-eyes—right, Joe?"

"If he was alive, I wouldn't even sell to Sessue Hayakawa."

Tillie zeroed back to Amanda. "Now, look, you move in here with us and get out of that dump on Cynthia Street. We're offering you a very lavish home. We need to be looked after but we don't want no professional nurse bossing us around. You're a damned good cook and we have a girl what comes in twice a week. She's one of them there wetbacks but I got her real cheap, threatened to have her deported. You see, we're both getting way up there, near eighty. And this Disulfiram we take to keep us from drinking is hard on our systems. Our doctor—Irving Kildare, you remember him—?"

"Wasn't he in the Our Gang comedies?"

"That's Irving. Well, anyway, he worries we might take too much and kill ourselves. At our age, you get a little forgetful."

"At my age, too," said Amanda, trying to remember what Tillie was offering her.

Tillie continued, "You'll have a lovely room and bath on the second floor and a fair allowance and reasonable time off for good be—you know, time to visit friends and relatives."

Joe poured himself another cup of tea. "Tell her the rest."

"You tell her. Just thinking about it makes me want to cry." She bit into a tollhouse cookie and passionately demolished it.

"Amanda—" Joe spoke her name gravely "—if you outlive us, we'll provide in our wills that you'll be handsomely taken care of for the rest of your life."

"What about Roy?"

"What about him?" asked Tillie, screwing up her face. It looked freshly freed from a bad job of wrapping.

"Aren't you providing for your son?"

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"Of course we are," said Joe. "What's one thing got to do with the other?"

"Nothing. Just you made it sound like—well, there was that picture I did with Warren William where he cut his son out of his will and left it all to his secretary. But then that was played by darling Anita Louse—"

"Louise," corrected Tillie.

"Amanda, this ain't no rerun on the tube," said Joe. "This is real life as you never see it on television. This is a djen-you-wine offer we're making you." He leaned forward and squinted. "You ain't going to pass it up, are you?"

"Hell, no!" said Amanda exuberantly. "This is the best offer I've had since Louis B. Mayer spirited me off to Aguascalientes fifty years ago." She thought for a moment and then asked, "Disulfiram? I don't think I've ever heard of it."

"If you take it, you don't drink booze—it makes you violently ill. We been sober almost half a year now—right, Tillie?"

"Right, Joe."

"Then it's dangerous," said Amanda.

"It sure as hell is," said Tillie. "More dangerous than being alone with Freddie March in a dressing room. By the way, Amanda, how's *your* health?"

"Actually, there's my heart."

"You've got a bad heart?" Tillie didn't look happy.

"Well, it's not *too* bad. But it does act up a bit every now and then. When I try to carry heavy things or I walk too fast or I'm going up stairs."

"We've got an elevator," said Joe. "And there'd be nothing heavy for you to carry."

Amanda smiled. "Then we'll be one big happy family. When do you want me to move in?"

"Right away," said Tillie. "You got a lease? We'll break it, or we'll have the city condemn your building."

"Oh, no need for that. The management will be happy to see me go. Then they can really stiff the next tenant."

"So get a move on, girl," said Tillie gaily. "Go get your things and come on home." She made "home" sound all warm and cozy. "If you need some help, we'll get Roy to give you a hand."

"Oh, no—the boys in the building will do it all. I'll give my furnishings to the Salvation Army."

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Suggested Tillie, "Wouldn't the County Museum make more sense?"

When Roy Baker arrived later that evening, he found Amanda comfortably settled in as a member of the household. "What a great idea," he approved, sounding enthusiastic but inwardly apprehensive.

Alone with his parents in the upstairs sitting room reserved for family, Republicans, anti-semites, and other bigots, he bravely asked his father to settle a sum of money on him. He couldn't ignore the anger reddening Joe's face, making the blue veins stand out like neon lights. "But, Pop," he pursued, "this way, it eliminates my paying death taxes."

"You'll get your goddamned inheritance when your mother and I are up there playing poker with Jack Oakie and W. C. Fields and not a day sooner!" Joe said, storming out of the sitting room.

Tillie folded her arms and regarded her spinoff with silent rebuke for a few seconds. Then she said, "Roy, you could be injurious to your father's health. Why can't you get a job like real people do? I know times are tough and getting tougher, but we've still got connections. We could get you a job in retail like that thing you married does."

Roy said bravely, "I've got other plans for myself. I met a guy who's teaching me club work."

"What do you mean, club work? Like waiting tables, washing dishes—that sort of club work?"

"No, Mom—it's more comical."

"Comical? You? You couldn't make a hyena laugh."

"I got a lot to offer, Mom," said Roy heatedly. "You and Pop never had any faith in me. Why'd you have a child, anyway?"

"Don't blame us! We were drunk!"

Roy stood up to go.

"You speak to your father before you go," Tillie commanded. "You hear me?" Roy's eyes were misting and he turned away from his mother. "If he's not in his room, he'll be noshing in the kitchen."

Joe was in the kitchen nuzzling Amanda's neck. "You stop that, Joe Baker!" cautioned Amanda. "Tillie could walk in and catch us at it!"

"She ain't caught us at it for the past thirty years, has she?"

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"That's because you always came to my place. But now it's different—we're living under the same roof," Amanda pointed out. She was preparing batter for her celebrated sourdough bread. "We have to be care—Why, hello, Roy. How's about a cup of cocoa?"

Roy was standing in the doorway. "No, thanks. I've got to get going. Sorry I upset you, Pop. I won't do it again."

"What's the big rush?" asked Joe.

"I got to meet this guy I met and rehearse."

Amanda was interested. "You doing a play or something?"

"I'm rehearsing something comical."

Joe guffawed and said, "You? Comical? You couldn't make a hyena laugh."

"That's what Mom said. I guess you been living together too long. I'll phone you later in the week."

After he was gone, Amanda said, "You're too hard on him. It's not his fault he's had to live in the shadow of celebrated parents all his life."

"That didn't hurt Michael Douglas or those sons of Lloyd Bridges. I don't know, Amanda, I get a suspicion sometimes the gods were looking the other way when Roy was born. Anyway, we figured he might be a cowboy star. We named him for Roy Rogers. But the poor bastard's afraid of horses. Come on, gorgeous, give me a kiss."

Six months later, the world learned of the tragic death of Tillie Baker from a suspected misuse of the drug Disulfiram. The funeral chapel was crowded with a host of living legends who themselves were candidates for boneyard occupancy. Roy and Bess sat in the front pew next to Joe and Amanda. Both son and daughter-in-law disapproved of the older couple holding hands.

"There's something going on there," whispered Bess to Roy. Roy nodded in agreement and squeezed his wife's hand.

Joe whispered to Amanda, "Your heart still acting up?"

"It's fine now. Just fine."

Someone behind them shushed them. Joe turned and snapped, "Don't you shush me, it's *my* wife we're burying." He said to Roy, "Is this as funny as that comedy stuff you're trying to do?"

Roy's face was a mask. "I thought you loved Mom."

"Sure, sure. But she'd want us to be laughing. She could always take a joke."

Except when it was on her, thought Roy, and he began waiting for the worst.

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The worst happened two months later. Joe and Amanda flew to Las Vegas and got married after a couple of hours at a blackjack table. Joe phoned Roy from the M-G-M Grand Hotel and broke the news.

"You don't sound terribly happy for me," he said sharply.

"I'm very happy for you," responded Roy. "You just took me by surprise. It's just so soon after Mom's death, that's all."

"At my age, it's not too soon. You wish us luck?"

"Pop, I wish you everything you both deserve."

Roy hung up and shared the news with Bess.

Bess slammed her hand down on the cardtable. They'd been playing canasta. "There's something rotten about this."

"I think they killed Mom."

Bess looked at her husband. He was transformed. The boyish look was gone. He was mature and now dangerous. "There's no way to prove it," she said.

"No, but maybe there's a way to fix it. You can guess what Amanda's up to. With Mom dead, there's only me to inherit."

"Tillie told you Amanda was also in Joe's will. They promised she'll be taken care of if she outlives them."

"And I'll bet she plans to outlive Joe."

"Yes, I'll bet she does, too. But then, maybe she won't. She had that heart attack after the funeral."

"Yes. She has to be very careful. Deal the cards, honey."

When Joe and Amanda were back in residence on Alpine Drive, Roy dutifully visited, using his key to the house as he always did.

He was startled to see his father looking years younger. Amanda served coffee and sandwiches and sat in a rocker knitting. Joe was pleased to be told by his son that he looked wonderful and he went to his room to get some new jackets he'd bought that afternoon at a trendy shop on Canon Drive. A few moments later, Amanda's head shot up. "Did you hear that?"

"Hear what?" Roy asked.

"From the hall." She arose and crossed to the hall. "There's nobody out there. I could have sworn I heard someone call my name." She went back to her chair, but when she picked up the knitting her hands were trembling.

"There it is again!" She dropped the knitting. "You must have heard it, too! '*Amanda—Amanda—that's too much—*' "

"Too much what?"

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Amanda said nothing. Her face was ashen. Joe returned with the expensive and ghastly jackets, which he modeled for Roy. "What do you think?" he asked.

Amanda leaped out of her chair and shrieked, "Shut up! Shut up! Shut up!"

"What in hell's the matter with you?" yelled Joe.

"She's hearing voices," said Roy.

"What voices? What's wrong, Amanda?"

"I'm hearing Tillie! I'm hearing Tillie!"

"Tillie! You got a screw loose or something?"

Amanda hurried out of the room. Roy looked bemused. *"Tillie?* She's hearing Mom?"

Joe said quietly, "Ain't that weird?" He sat in a chair. "She ain't been feeling too well. I'll take her to the doctor tomorrow." He rubbed his forehead. "Anyway, how's your comedy thing coming?"

"I'm ready for the big time. I've got a night booked at the Improv in four weeks. You'll come, won't you?"

"I wouldn't miss it for the world. At last I'll get to see you doing a turn. Well, how about that? What a shame your mother didn't live to see it." He hesitated. "You okay for cash?"

"My God, Pop, you're not really offering me money!"

"Damn it, Roy, I wish things had been different with us. But it wasn't me—honestly, kid, it wasn't me. It was Tillie. She never wanted no kids. She just never knew how to deal with you. She couldn't stand it you had no djen-you-wine talent like us. We didn't give you nothing, Roy. So please let me give you some money.

"You know what!" he added eagerly. "I'm going to do what you asked me to do. I'm going to make a settlement on you. I'm calling my lawyer right now. You get a good hunk of it, anyway, you and Amanda. And after she goes, it'll be all yours."

Amanda's shriek was horrendous. They rushed to her room across the hall.

She was sitting at her dressing table clutching her breast. "Amanda, what's wrong?" cried Joe.

"She won't forgive me," gasped Amanda. "Tillie won't forgive—" She couldn't finish the sentence. Roy caught her as she slumped to the floor.

The week after Amanda's funeral, Joe, true to his promise, turned over a sizeable portion of his wealth to Roy. He asked Roy and Bess to come live with him. Bess thrilled at the idea of being mistress of

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her hated mother-in-law's dominion. Joe talked of nothing but Roy's forthcoming appearance at the Improv. But all the while he grew feebler and wizened.

As Bess dolled up for Roy's appearance that night, she said to him, "Your father's gotten awfully feeble. I hope he can get through the night."

"Joe will be fine. He's made of sturdier stuff."

"It didn't look that way to me when he was dribbling his dinner." She sighed and applied more mascara. "What's your act about, anyway?"

Roy laughed. "You'll see for yourself."

Bess blinked with exasperation. "Why is the wife always the last to know?"

It was Friday night at the Improv and wall-to-wall with humanity. Bess and Joe sat at the best table and waited impatiently for Roy to appear in the spotlight. They endured three comics—two men and a very vulgar young woman who seemed in need of toilet training, especially for her mouth.

Finally, it was Roy's turn. He started slowly, as his mentor had taught him, first getting the feel of the house. "You know what a Brontesaurus is?" he asked. "That's a prehistoric English authoress." It got a titter. This audience would never have heard of the Brontes. Then he asked, "You know what's a Castro convertible? It's a Cuban bisexual." That got a good laugh. He continued with one-liners for three more minutes, then he said, "I have to stop hogging the stage—I've got a partner and I can see she's getting very impatient."

Bess paled. A *partner*. *She's* getting very impatient. All those nights he didn't come home until two or three in the morning. He said he was rehearsing. A *partner*. *She*.

From behind a screen, Roy brought an almost life-sized female doll and sat in a chair with the doll on his lap.

Bess and Joe's faces were frozen. "My God," said Bess, "it's Tillie. The dummy looks just like Tillie!"

Joe couldn't speak. He was in shock, paralyzed.

The dummy's mouth moved, and they heard a brilliant imitation of Tillie. Bess was thinking, He's proving himself. He *is* a chip off the old blockheads. From the dummy's mouth came, "*Forgive* you,

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you bitch? *Forgive* you, Amanda, for overdosing me with Disulfiram? I know you and Joe have been lovers. Well, let me tell you, you conniving bitch—"

Bess heard Joe's death rattle and saw his head drop to his chest, but she did nothing. This was Roy's night, and he was going over big, especially with her.

DETECTIVERSE

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by DON PEYER

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Set a trap and caught the crook,
Sued him for the dough he took,
Showed the court an inky trail—
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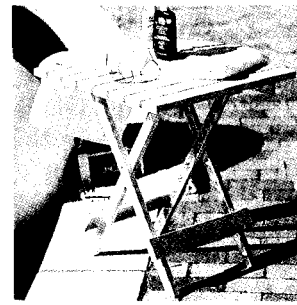

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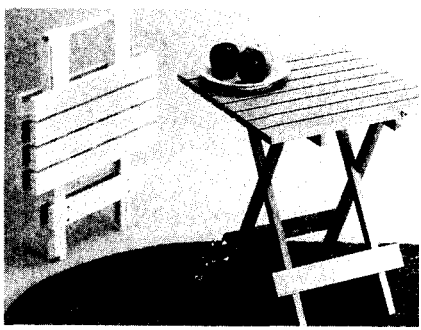

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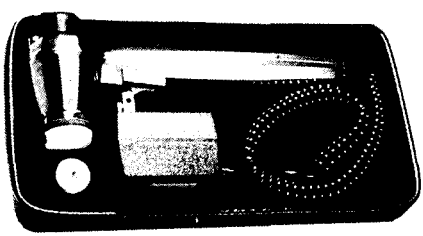

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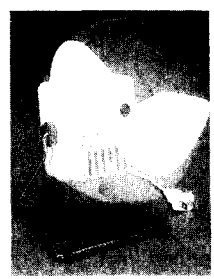

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These five questions concern themselves with EQMM's Department of First Stories. Put them aside to send with the other forty-five when all fifty questions have been put to you in the October issue. See the facing page for further instructions and information.

36. Rambo first appeared in the novel, *First Blood,* which was written by an author whose first fiction appeared in EQMM's Department of First Stories. Name either the author or the story or both.

37. Who is the author of the cult classic, *Time and Again,* whose fiction was also first published professionally in EQMM?

38. Which 1957 Department of First Stories author was nominated for an Edgar for a story titled "Mousie" published in EQMM in 1981?

39. Robert L. Fish's first story, "The Adventure of the Ascot Tie," was published in our Department of Firsts in 1960. The first Robert L. Fish Award for best first short mystery fiction of the year (1983) went to Heidi Vanderbilt for a story in EQMM. What is its title?

40. Name the writing team whose first collaboration appeared in EQMM. They were honored with the Ellery Queen Award by the Mystery Writers of America in 1989.

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First Prize: Limited-edition poster of *EQMM*'s first cover
Fifty Years of the Best from Ellery Queen, edited by Eleanor Sullivan, published by Carroll & Graf
Ellery Queen 50th Anniversary mug
The option to appear on a cover of *EQMM* with a celebrity of the winner's choice who agrees to said cover

Second and Third Prizes: Limited-edition poster of *EQMM*'s first cover

Fourth through Thirteenth Prizes: *Fifty Years of the Best from Ellery Queen*

Fourteenth through Twenty-third Prizes: Ellery Queen 50th Anniversary mugs

The winner will be the top scorer in answering 50 questions related to *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*—there will be 5 questions an issue from January through October 1991. In case of a tie, the earliest postmark will determine the winner. The deadline is October 15, 1991—entries should carry a postmark no later than that date.

All 50 questions must be submitted as a unit, the pages or copies of the pages for all ten issues together. Material sent in sections will not be considered. Only one entry will be allowed per person. All entries must include the contestant's legal name and full address. No entries will be returned, even if accompanied by a return envelope. Winners will be notified by mail and announced in the March 1992 issue. (No phone calls, please.)

Contributors to *EQMM* are not eligible to win the contest, nor are employees and their immediate families of Davis Publications, Inc., Carlson Promotion Group, or any of their affiliated agents, advertising, and promotional production agencies. All applicable federal, state, and local laws and regulations apply.

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Everyone else accepted that Stanley had committed suicide. Okay, the note he left didn't explain why he couldn't go on, but it was *in his handwriting, spidery as ever.*

Martin Edwards reviews and writes about crime for a number of U.K. magazines and he is a member of Britain's Crime Writers Association. The rights to "Are You Sitting Comfortably?" have been bought for publication in Bella *magazine in England, but this is the story's—and the author's—first fiction publication in the U.S. . . .*

ARE YOU SITTING COMFORTABLY?

by MARTIN EDWARDS

Are you sitting comfortably? Then I'll begin.

Fair enough, Bernice, I admit it. I *am* a murderer. But don't gloat too soon. By the time you read this, I'll be out of your reach.

You know, I can picture you in your favorite armchair. Just about to settle down to a hard evening's viewing, weren't you, when you padded out of the kitchen, cocoa cup in hand, and saw the envelope pushed under the door? The envelope containing these few typed sheets. You're a creature of habit—the telly will still be on in the background, I'm sure of that—but keep reading, it's important.

I'm sorry about Stanley, truly I am. Poor, fussy Stanley. He wasn't a bad man. For an estate agent, anyway. Though I never understood why he was the apple of your eye. Were you jealous of me? I don't think so—I think you simply resented having a common daughter-in-law who'd been smart enough to marry the boss. Be honest, from day one you tried to turn him against me. All because I wore short skirts and wasn't much of a typist.

Why didn't you accept Stanley had committed suicide? Everyone

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else did. Okay, the note he left didn't explain why he couldn't go on, but it *was* in his handwriting, spidery as ever. No wonder I had trouble with my typing. The coroner certainly sympathized with me. And had a good look at my legs into the bargain.

But you simply wouldn't let it alone, wouldn't accept that one afternoon your precious son had put a noose round his neck and kicked away the chair. And in a terraced house on the wrong side of town, too. Yet people like Stanley, professional men, have to cope with all kinds of pressures. The coroner told me so the night after the inquest.

I might have taken my share of the blame, might have tried to explain things to you, but you wouldn't have understood. No chance of consolation, only hysterical rage. So I kept quiet, never dreaming you'd start sniffing round and accuse me of murder.

The sergeant warned you I could prove I was down in London the day Stanley died. I said I'd been to the Ideal Home Exhibition and that ticket collector from Euston remembered my legs. The sergeant told me what you said to that—we were at a wine bar. He mimicked you saying, "Ideal Home? Ideal Home? She's a slut, you oaf. Can't tell one end of a dustpan from another." But the sergeant agreed with me dusting isn't the most important thing for a young girl to master.

And I am still young. That's what makes this whole mess so sad. Such a waste.

Sorry, I didn't mean to be maudlin. I've always looked for the good things in life. Though for me everything always seems to boil down to men and to money. Mostly men. Stanley was where the money came in.

When the police showed you the door, you might have got the message. But no—you had to hire a private detective. Does it surprise you that I know about him? He trailed me to the sauna one day and we got chatting. Later on he told me your theory. Quite ingenious, he thought.

You were so sure I wanted rid of Stanley. I suppose you thought I had my eye on his stamp collection. And to be free for one of my fancy men, as you call them. (Though there wasn't much fancy about the coroner or the sergeant, I can tell you that. I'm just too friendly for my own good sometimes.)

I expect you got the idea from a thriller on the box. They ought

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to be more careful about the stuff they put out. You reckoned I'd got my lover to set up a rendezvous with Stanley, posing as a prospective purchaser while I was out of harm's way. Once in the house, the rest was easy. The scene was set for Stanley's last hang-up.

You wanted the detective to watch me until I led him to lover boy. Nice idea. Only problem is, there was never anyone special for me.

All right, I did lie about the Ideal Home Exhibition. As a matter of fact, I went to work instead. For the last two years I've had a part-time job in a big hotel in London. How can I describe it without being crude? Making money from my hobby, let's say. Think of it like Stanley selling some of his stamps.

No regrets. We are what we are. Well, maybe one regret. That I got caught. But who by, I wonder? The South African gentleman with funny ideas? The bloke who quoted poetry at the most unexpected moment? The man from Militant Tendency, the barrister who liked it with his wig on?

Only joking. I really don't know. As I explained to Stanley when he realized what his symptoms meant. I hadn't even had the test then myself. But he was panic-stricken, couldn't believe what had happened to him. I tried reassurance. It can take years before the worst happens.

But look what he did the moment my back was turned. His suicide shook me, though at first I tried to carry on as before. Bad luck on the coroner and the sergeant, but men in their position ought to know better.

Your private detective's rather different. He's crazy about me, he'll do anything I ask. If only we'd met years ago. Trouble is, I've not been feeling good lately. My doctor's been frank—though he's worried sick, since I helped him through a rough patch eighteen months back.

So I've decided to go out in style. This very evening. In the London hotel, it seems appropriate. At seven-thirty they'll find me dangling from a chandelier in the conference room. Out of reach, like I said.

Let's see. It must be eight by now. I bet you're feeling smug, knowing I've paid my price. But wait. Can you hear a tap on the door?

Good.

The tapping's getting louder, isn't it? Don't fret, he'll stop in a minute. He's got a copy of one of your keys, as a matter of fact.

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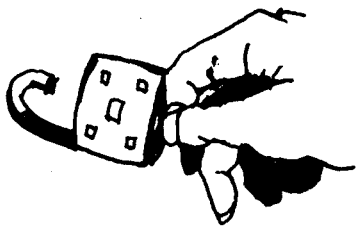
Sit down. Don't waste your time with the telephone, he saw to that ten minutes ago when he slipped the envelope under the door.

Have you guessed? It's your private detective, come back to visit. Like me, I'm afraid he's nothing left to lose. And your idea of how I had Stanley killed was too good to waste. Last time we spoke, my detective still hadn't decided upon the ligature. A cord perhaps—or a length of chicken wire. What do you think it will be? Hear the door opening? His footsteps as he moves toward your living room? No? Try turning the volume on the TV down.

And, by the way, are you still sitting comfortably?



DETECTIVERSE

HASTE MAKES WASTE

by JAMES F. WEBB

The con man watched his victim write
His name on her big check,
And when he thought that she was done
He grabbed her by the neck
And choked her hard 'til she was dead,
Then dropped her on the floor.
The con man grabbed the check and fled,
His fortunes to restore,
But at the bank his hopes went smash—
Check payment was declined.
The reason he could get no cash:
Her check had not been signed.

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a *NEW* Dr. Sam Hawthorne story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

April came through the swinging door from the kitchen. "Sam, how are you? It's so good of you to come."

"You know I wouldn't miss the baptism. Where's it to be held?"

"At a little country church near here called St. George in the Woods." She glanced into the dining room and took Dr. Sam's arm. "Come meet your namesake's godmother . . . "

THE PROBLEM OF THE COUNTRY CHURCH

by EDWARD D. HOCH

This was in November of '36 [Dr. Sam Hawthorne told his visitor, filling their glasses with the usual small libation]—just after President Roosevelt's re-election. My former nurse April had been happily married for nearly two years to Andre Mulhone, owner of the Greenbush Inn, a popular Maine resort hotel. They'd recently had their first child, a boy they named Sam after me, and I'd been asked to be his godfather. It was an honor I couldn't refuse.

So it was that I drove up to southern Maine on that second weekend in November, leaving Mary Best to handle things at the office, referring patients to Dr. Potter, a friend who'd agreed to handle any emergencies. By this time of year the trees were bare in Maine, and I was surprised not to find any trace of snow on the ground. It had been a warm autumn, but Friday had turned cold and rainy and I half expected the rain to become snow as I drove north. Instead there was sunshine, and I reached the Greenbush Inn before dinnertime.

Andre came out from behind the registration desk to shake hands. "It's great to see you again, Dr. Sam! April and I are overjoyed you're

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going to be Sam's godfather." Mulhone came from a French-Irish background. His first wife had died in an auto accident. He was a handsome man, older than April, and his cosmopolitan interests had opened a whole new world to her. I was happy for them both.

April appeared a moment later, coming through the swinging door from the kitchen. "Sam, how are you? It's so good of you to come."

"You know I wouldn't miss the baptism. Where's it to be held?"

"At a little country church near here called St. George in the Woods. The minister comes here for dinner once a week and we've grown quite friendly." She glanced into the dining room and took my arm. "Come meet your namesake's godmother."

Ivy Preston was one of the waitresses at the inn, a sleek brunette whose brown eyes fixed me with an open stare. "So you're the unmarried doctor."

"Ivy!" April pretended shock.

"Pleased to meet you, Ivy," I said, extending my hand.

"Forgive me, Dr. Hawthorne. April is always trying to find me a boy friend and I like to kid her about it."

"Call me Sam," I told her. "I won't take it as being too personal."

Andre walked over to join us. "Are the women ganging up on you, Sam?"

"I can handle it," I reassured him.

"Have you seen little Sam yet?" Ivy asked.

"I just got here."

"He's adorable! Let's have a peek at him, April."

Sam Mulhone, barely a month old, was in a blue bassinet on a side table in the kitchen. The cook, a middle-aged Frenchman named Henri, was taking time out from his pre-dinner chores to tickle the baby gently under the chin. I smiled and said, "He looks just like you, April."

"Don't let his father hear you say that. He has baby pictures to prove Sam is a Mulhone through and through."

The baby was chubby and good-natured, with a wisp of brownish hair. "Does he keep you awake at night?"

"He hasn't been bad at all. Once he goes to sleep, nothing seems to bother him. If we're lucky, he'll sleep right through his christening tomorrow."

As we left the kitchen, I said, "Tell me about yourself, April. Do you work here in the kitchen?"

"I help out sometimes, but mostly I handle the registrations and the account books. Our business has really grown in the past two

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years, Sam. We're a popular resort and also a fine dining place. In the summer people even drive up from New Hampshire to have dinner here. Andre's been very successful."

"Do you ever miss nursing?"

"Yes. But working for you in the office wasn't the same as hospital nursing. I was taking care of your books, doing many of the same things I'm doing here. I like it. Of course, now that Sam's on the scene, I'll be looking after him a good share of the time."

Ivy went back to work as the first dinner customers arrived. She showed a couple to a table by the window and presented them with menus. "That used to be another of my jobs," April said, "but I think Ivy will be taking it over now."

"She seems very agreeable."

"I hope you didn't mind being kidded about your bachelorhood. Actually, Ivy *has* a boy friend, a young man who does odd jobs around here, Joe Curtiss. He picks up guests at the train station and fixes things. He shovels snow in the winter. He even rigged up a snowplow that the horse can pull."

"No need for that yet."

She laughed. "Remember all the snow the first time we came here, when I met Andre?"

"How could I forget?"

"*How's your new nurse doing?*"

"Mary's doing fine—she's a great help to me. That doesn't mean I don't miss you, though."

A sandy-haired young man came through the front door carrying a pile of firewood. "Just in case it turns chilly tonight," he told April. "I'll leave it by the fireplace."

"Thanks, Joe. Dr. Sam, this is Joe Curtiss. Meet Dr. Sam Hawthorne, Joe. He's going to be Sam's godfather tomorrow."

The young man grinned in response. "I wish I could be there. But I have to take some people to the train. Nice to meet you, Dr. Hawthorne."

He added the wood to a stack next to the fireplace, then went off to speak with Ivy.

"How many employees do you have here in all?" I asked April.

"Well, if you count Andre and me there are twelve full-time people and another six who come in part-time when we need them."

Andre joined us again. "Remember, Dr. Sam, we talked once about skiing becoming a popular American sport? I may not live to see it, but my son will. There'll be a day when this area has trails blazed

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through the woods and down the sides of the mountains. People will come from all over the Northeast to ski in a New England winter, the way Europeans go to Switzerland now."

"You certainly have a perfect location for it," I said, remembering the hills on the way up.

"Come, I'll show you your room," April said. "You're dining with us tonight—in an hour?"

"Fine."

"The Reverend Dr. Lawrence is joining us. He'll be performing the christening in the morning."

Howard Lawrence was white-haired and nearsighted. "I am not St. Lawrence," he assured me on our first meeting, blinking from behind thick glasses, "though my name is spelled the same way." I was certain he'd used that line many times before.

"It's a pleasure to meet you, sir."

"Please call me Howard," he said, shaking my hand.

We sat with April and Andre at a window table. Though it had been dark for some time, a few spotlights on the roof of the inn illuminated the grounds nearby. "It's a lovely place," the minister commented. "I envy the lad growing up in these surroundings."

The meal was delicious, much better than those I remembered from my visit two years earlier. Maybe it was April's influence, or a new chef. I couldn't remember if Henri had been there on my earlier visit.

It being the off-season, there were only about a dozen other guests at the inn. "And the Depression doesn't help any," Andre said. "But we did very well this summer and we have good bookings over the holidays."

I was aware of a man seated alone at a table across the dining room from us. "Is that man here alone?" I asked April.

Howard Lawrence peered in the direction I indicated and shrugged. "I can't see that far, even with these glasses. Is it anyone I know, April?"

"I doubt it. His name's Frederick Winter. His family owns Winter's Department Store in Boston. He's not the churchgoing sort."

"He comes here a couple of times a year," Andre explained. "Generally he has some young woman with him, but he's here alone this time."

Winter finished his dinner a short time later and stopped at the table on his way out, greeting Andre and April with a smile and

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some small talk. He was dark-haired and probably in his mid-thirties, running slightly overweight. "Would you like to join us for dessert?" Andre asked him.

"No, go on with your meal. I just stopped by to say hello."

I could see from his disarming smile that he could be the sort to attract women for the wrong reasons. He shook hands firmly when April introduced me and told him about the christening. "Let me know when you bring the boy down to Boston for a shopping spree," he told April.

She laughed. "That won't be for a few years yet."

After Winter had gone, Andre remarked, "I hope he has enough money to cover his bill."

"What's that?" the minister asked.

"Nothing—I probably shouldn't have mentioned it. Last time there was a little trouble with his check, but he made good on it."

Dr. Lawrence sighed. "I don't envy you your job, Andre. At least I know the money I receive on the collection plate is real."

"What time do you want us there tomorrow?" April asked.

"Let's make it at eleven," he said, "if that's convenient for you."

Saturday dawned with a warming breeze coming up from the south. By ten-thirty, Andre had pulled his car around to the detached log house behind the inn that served as the family's comfortable living quarters. I was waiting there with Ivy Preston, who looked stylish in her camel coat and cloche hat. April came out the front door carrying the bassinet with Sam inside.

"He's sleeping peacefully," she told us. "I think we're going to be lucky." I could just glimpse his closed eyes surrounded by the baby bunting.

I climbed in the front seat with Andre, while the women got in back with the baby. The Church of St. George in the Woods was on the main highway about two miles past the turnoff for the Greenbush Inn. Andre's late-model Nash rode smoothly, and he handled it with ease. We reached the church almost before I realized it. "Here we are," he said, parking in the cinder driveway next to the old stone building. The double oak doors were unlocked and we entered a medium-sized church with about twenty-five or thirty pews facing the altar. It was dimly lit by a few flickering candles, but I could make out a small choir loft extending over the last few pews and an organ up front to the right of the altar. A wooden board listed the numbers of the Sunday hymns.

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Ivy was carrying the bassinet and she slipped into the third pew from the rear. I stepped in next to her while Andre and April walked to the front of the church. Dr. Lawrence appeared almost at once and turned on a small spotlight that bathed the altar in a subdued pink glow. He shook their hands and called a greeting back to us. I could see the baptismal font now, a carved marble pedestal whose concave top held a few inches of holy water for administering the blessing. The minister fell in deep conversation with the parents, impressing upon them in low tones the importance of bringing up the boy as a good Christian.

Then he called back to Ivy and me, "You can bring the baby now." Andre and April turned to watch.

I stood and stepped out of the pew while Ivy reached to her other side and carefully lifted the baby in its blue bunting from the bassinet. Then she joined me and we walked down the aisle together. At the altar, April reached out for her son. I was watching her face—and saw the radiance of her expression suddenly freeze into a bewildered stare.

"What is this? Where—?"

She pulled back the hood of the bunting and we all saw it. The baby was gone. In its place was a curly-haired Shirley Temple doll.

"Is this some sort of terrible joke?" Andre asked Ivy angrily.

Then I noticed the little piece of paper pinned to the doll's dress. "What's this?" I said, removing it, trying to suppress my sense of alarm.

It was a block of type cut from a magazine: Have fifty thousand dollars ready, 25,000 in twenty-dollar bills, 15,000 in ten-dollar bills, and 10,000 in five-dollar bills. In 4–5 hours we will inform you where to deliver the money.

We searched every pew of the church and then I hurried outside to see if anyone was getting away. I even checked Andre's Nash, though there was no rational reason why the baby should have been there. When I came back inside, Ivy Preston was close to tears. "I should have known right away that something was wrong. This doll wasn't as heavy as the baby."

"It's not your fault," April tried to comfort her, somehow managing to keep control of her own emotions.

"But this thing is impossible!" Andre said. "There are only four of us here—five counting Dr. Lawrence. None of us did it and no one else could have entered the church without being seen."

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He turned to me for confirmation and I was glad to give it. "There are only dim lights in here but it's bright outdoors. See how it brightens up when these big oak doors are opened? Surely we'd have noticed that. There's no one hiding between or beneath the pews, but I'll check the rest of the building just to be sure."

Dr. Lawrence had been struggling to read the message pinned to the doll. "Does this mean the baby has been kidnaped?" he asked.

"No!" April insisted. "It must be a joke of some sort!" She turned to me. "Sam?"

"I don't know, April. Let me search the rest of the place."

With Dr. Lawrence guiding me, we checked the vestry behind the altar and any likely hiding places by the altar itself. I went up the few steps to the pulpit, but it was empty. We went up to the choir loft and examined a small side door the minister said the choir used on special occasions like Christmas. "It's kept locked most of the time," he said. "The congregation uses the front door."

An ordinary skeleton key would probably have opened it, but that was the least of our problems. No one could have approached Ivy and me without being noticed. Certainly no one could have removed the baby and substituted a doll while standing only inches away from us. I went back and checked the bassinet again. There was nothing else in it, no false bottom or secret compartment.

Andre watched me search. When I came up empty-handed, he put his arm tenderly around April and said quietly, "I think it's time to call the police."

A State Police car was on the scene within a half hour. The officer was probably still in his twenties, a blond young man named Corporal Jenkins. After listening to our story, he examined the message that had been cut from the magazine and pinned to the doll.

"Notice this word 'hours,' " he said, pointing to it. "That's been changed with a pencil. You can see underneath it the printing says 'days.' Whoever did this didn't want to wait that long, so he changed it. This was cut from some magazine account of the Lindbergh kidnaping. It's the first half of the ransom note left when Lindbergh's baby son was taken."

"They found him dead!" April said with a gasp. Her shaky composure showed signs of cracking.

"This looks like the work of an amateur to me," Corporal Jenkins told her gently.

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Andre hugged April tighter as she began to cry. "If he's such an amateur, how did he manage to take the baby in the first place?" he asked Jenkins.

"I don't know," the officer admitted. "But I can have fifty men up here by the end of the day. We'll search these woods—"

I checked my pocketwatch and said, "Sam's been gone for over an hour. I think we should all get back to the inn. If the kidnaper does try to contact you, Andre, that's where he'll call."

We drove back together, with the State Police car following. Dr. Lawrence promised to follow shortly. There was little activity at the inn when we reached it, though I saw Frederick Winter walking toward it from the nearby woods. We headed immediately for Andre's office and he told the desk clerk he wasn't to be disturbed for routine business but that any incoming phone calls should be put right through.

Henri, the chef I'd met the previous day, was waiting in Andre's office. "We have a problem in the kitchen, Mr. Mulhone."

"I'm sorry, Henri, I can't handle it now. Do the best you can and I'll try to check with you later."

The Frenchman seemed a bit surprised, but like a good employee he said, "Very well, sir," and retreated from the room.

We settled down in the office to wait. "As soon as there's some contact from the kidnapers," Jenkins said, "I'll feel justified in contacting the F.B.I."

"Why not now?" April wanted to know. Her nerves were dangerously on edge and I considered getting a sedative from my bag upstairs.

"Well, the whole thing just seems so impossible—" He hesitated, then continued, "It *could* be a joke of some sort."

"A joke!" Andre growled. "Our *baby* is *missing!*"

I excused myself and headed for my room, but I encountered Joe Curtiss, carrying some guests' bags in from his car. "Dr. Hawthorne, wait up a minute, will you?" He left the bags at the reception desk and hurried over. "What's the trouble? I just got back from the station and I saw everyone trooping into the office with glum faces. How'd the christening go?"

"It was postponed," I told him shortly, hurrying on upstairs.

In my room I opened the medical pouch I always carried in my suitcase and took out some powders for possible administration to

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April and her husband. I had no intention of using them unless it became absolutely necessary, because they could be faced with some terrible decisions during the next few hours.

I returned to the office and waited with them. Corporal Jenkins had made some local calls, putting out a missing-persons alarm for an infant boy. He also asked that the railroad station be checked in case someone tried to leave with the baby.

For his part, Andre was on the phone with his banker, making arrangements about the money, should the situation come to that. April sat on the big leather sofa with Ivy Preston, listening to it all as if in a daze.

"How are you doing?" I asked her, coming over to join them.

"I don't understand any of this, Dr. Sam," she said. "Why is Andre calling his bank? We don't have that kind of money in ready cash."

I'd understood enough of the conversation to answer her. "I believe he's putting up the inn as collateral on a loan."

"No!" She hurried to her husband's side. "Andre, you can't—it's all you have!"

"He's my son, too, April. Getting him back is all that matters."

Ivy went to try to comfort her and Andre must have seen that the strain of waiting for the phone to ring was becoming too much. "April," he suggested, "why don't you and Dr. Sam go to the kitchen and see what was bothering Henri earlier. Whatever happened, we have our guests to consider."

She didn't answer for a moment. Then she straightened up and wiped her eyes. "Will you come with me, Sam?"

"Of course."

We found Henri issuing orders to his assistant, who was cleaning the big old wood-burning stove. He seemed relieved to see April and immediately launched into his tale of woe. "When we stack cordwood against the wall outside, it is for use in the stove."

"Of course," April agreed. "Everyone here knows that."

"But one of your guests has been stealing it and taking it away in the rumble seat of his car."

"Are you sure?"

"Positive. I noticed some logs missing yesterday and this morning I saw what was happening. I watched him for fifteen minutes but I did not feel it was my place to confront him."

"Who are you talking about?"

"Mr. Winter. I know he has been a valued guest here for years."

"Fred Winter stealing our firewood? I can't believe it!"

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"Please tell your husband. He must take some action."

April promised and we went out to look at the woodpile. "The entire *pile* would hardly bring five dollars," she said. "Firewood's so easy to come by in Maine!"

"Henri seems truly concerned, though."

"The woodpile's his territory. He feels as if he's being personally challenged." April turned and headed across the lot toward the house. I didn't know if I wanted to follow her, but I knew I had to. "April—"

"What is it, Dr. Sam?"

"I have to ask you something. It's a terrible question for me to ask, but I have to know. Is little Sam dead?"

"What! What are you talking about?"

"There's no possible way that doll could have been substituted for the baby in church, April. I was seated next to Ivy the entire time and no one approached us. The only explanation is that the doll and note were already in the bassinet when you brought it out to the car. If little Sam somehow died accidentally and you wanted to—"

"*No!*" she screamed. "My God, Dr. Sam!"

I got her into the house somehow and sat with her until her sobbing let up, then I tried to explain. "It was just that none of us got a good look at the baby in the car. And until now you've remained relatively calm about the kidnaping. It's as if you know he'll be found."

"Of course I know he'll be found! You're here, aren't you, Sam? If there's anyone in the world who can find him, it's you!"

"Yes," I said and stared bleakly out the window. My solution to the problem had seemed perfectly logical, except that this was April. She could never have done the thing I'd suggested.

We sat for the better part of an hour, talking very little, leaving only for a brief look at the baby's nursery. The sight of the crib and the small toys brought tears to her eyes again. "Sam, you should have known your idea was wrong—logically. You imagined my baby dying accidentally and me substituting the doll to fake a kidnaping and hide the fact of his death—a spur-of-the-moment crime. But on the spur of the moment, where would I have gotten the Shirley Temple doll? Certainly it wasn't a gift my son would have received."

I was starting to agree with her when there was a quick knock and the nursery door opened. Corporal Jenkins stuck his head in. "We've heard from the kidnaper, ma'am . . ."

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We hurried across the yard to the inn and found Andre on the phone to his bank once more. "The kidnaper called," Ivy told us excitedly. "He wants the money packed in a small suitcase and brought to the train station. Andre's to put it on board the four-thirty train to Boston."

"Just the suitcase?" I asked.

"That's all."

I turned to Jenkins. "Where does that train originate?"

"Bangor."

"Can you have men on it?"

"Sure."

"No!" April said sharply. "First we get Sam back! Then we worry about the kidnaper."

"She's right," Andre insisted. "Nothing must jeopardize the return of our son. We'll deliver the money as instructed."

"What did the kidnaper say?" I asked him.

"Just that he has Sam, and no harm will come to him if we follow orders about the money and the train."

"That's all?"

He glanced at April and then away. "Oh, there were the usual threats one expects from this sort of person."

"We'll get Sam back," I told his parents.

"I'm driving to the bank now to pick up the money," Andre said.

"You can't drive in the state you're in," Ivy told him reasonably. "Joe will drive you."

April agreed. "Do you want me to come along?"

Andre shook his head. "Stay here, sweetheart. Once the money is paid, he might call again to tell us where Sam is."

I think the fate of the Lindbergh baby was in all our minds just then. Nobody wanted to look at April. "I have an old suitcase you can use," Ivy said, trying to cover the awkward moment of silence. "It's in the kitchen."

I went with her while she emptied the small tan suitcase of a couple of dirty uniforms.

"Tell me something, Ivy," I said. "Have you ever been to a christening before at St. George in the Woods?"

"Oh, yes. A lot of my friends are having babies—in spite of the Depression."

"Was there anything about this morning that Dr. Lawrence did differently?"

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"No, it was exactly like the others I've seen as far as it went. Of course, the baby doesn't usually disappear."

"No." I picked up the empty suitcase and we headed back to Andre's office.

"Do you think they'll find him, Sam?" she asked me.

"If Andre's willing to pay the money, I see no reason for the kidnaper to harm the baby."

"The Lindbergh baby was killed, and Corporal Jenkins said it was the same ransom note. I don't know what I'll do if April doesn't get Sam back."

I slipped my arm around her shoulders to comfort her. "Once the money's delivered, I'm sure—" I stopped in midsentence, spotting something by the side of the inn that interested me: Frederick Winter, the young man from the wealthy Boston family, was stooped over the woodpile.

"What is it?" Ivy asked.

I handed her the suitcase. "Take this inside. I have something to do."

As I approached the woodpile, Winter straightened up. "Hello, there," he said with an innocent smile.

"What are you doing?"

"I dropped my cigarette lighter. I was just looking for it."

"Interesting. I understand you've been out here a few times lately. Is it the same lighter each time?"

His smile faded. "Say, who are you?"

"Sam Hawthorne. We met in the dining room last night. I'm a friend of the Mulhones."

"Well, I'm not harming anything."

"You've been taking wood from this pile—Henri, the chef, saw you."

"A few pieces of firewood for back home! Is that a crime?"

"You're taking the wood to burn it?" I asked.

"Why else would I take it?"

"To make space in the pile."

"For what?"

"A missing baby."

His forehead wrinkled into a quizzical frown. "You're crazy, you know that?" He turned and walked away.

I went through the pile and found nothing but wood. Maybe the man was right, I thought. Maybe I *was* becoming a little crazy . . .

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Joe Curtiss stowed the empty suitcase in the rumble seat of his car and a subdued Andre Mulhone got into the roadster with him. I followed along at a distance in Corporal Jenkins' car. We waited while they stopped at the bank for the money and then headed for the station.

"We shouldn't get too close," I cautioned. "The kidnaper could be watching."

"Don't worry, Doctor."

"I'm sorry, but I'm worried about that baby. We can't do anything to frighten the kidnaper into killing him."

"We have to face the fact that he may be dead already."

My mouth went dry. "Yes," I replied.

"By nightfall I'll have fifty men here. The F.B.I. is on its way from Boston."

"What about the four-thirty train?"

"I called the station and told them to flag it down."

"Flag it down?"

"We're a small town. Usually the train doesn't stop unless there's a passenger getting off or the stationmaster flags it."

"Could the kidnaper have boarded it this morning and simply be riding it back and forth, making his phone call from a station along the route?"

"He didn't board it here. The morning train went through without stopping."

I thought about that, keeping my eyes on the roadster ahead of us. Presently it turned off the road and stopped at the wooden station house with the sign GREENBUSH in place above the door. Joe got the suitcase from the rumble seat and Andre carried it out to the platform alone. We all waited in silence.

It was ten minutes before we heard the steam whistle on the 4:30 train to Boston. The engineer saw the flag and slowed to a stop at the station. Andre lifted the suitcase and placed it on board, apparently telling the conductor that someone would claim it. "That's it," Jenkins said. "We'll head back to the inn."

"Where does Ivy Preston live?" I asked him.

"Ivy? She has a little cottage just down the road from the inn."

"I'd appreciate it if you'll drop me there on our way past," I told him.

Ivy answered the door and asked anxiously, "Is something wrong? Did the money get put on the train?"

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"Everything's fine. The kidnaper should have it by now. The others have gone back to the inn, but I thought I'd stop here. Is April with you?" Though she hadn't invited me in, I stepped past her into a modestly furnished living room.

"She's back at the inn. I left her with Dr. Lawrence while I came home for a few minutes."

I nodded and sat down on the sofa. "I wanted to tell you that the mystery's been solved. The kidnaper has the money but Corporal Jenkins has him—he was arrested a few minutes ago."

Her mouth dropped open. "What?"

"I'm afraid he's your boy friend, Joe Curtiss."

She sank into the chair opposite me, the color draining from her face. "But how is that possible?"

"I've worked it all out—the only way it could have been done. You see, Joe slipped up when he said he couldn't attend the christening because he was taking people to the train. After the kidnaping, we saw him arriving with some luggage. But there were no passengers getting on or off the train this morning. Corporal Jenkins said it didn't even stop. If Joe was lying, what had he been up to at the time? It seems obvious the kidnaper had to be someone connected with the inn—most likely an employee or friend who knew about the christening and about Dr. Lawrence's routine at these events."

"Joe wasn't even there!" Ivy insisted. "No one entered the church after us, and you searched all the pews yourself!"

"No one entered the church after us because Joe was already hidden there. No one approached the pew, and little Sam certainly didn't drop through the floor. There's only one other place he could have gone."

"Where?"

"Up," I told her.

"Up?"

"The choir loft overhangs the last few pews, and we were seated in the third pew from the rear. Joe Curtiss, hidden there, lowered a stout cord with a hook on the end, snagged the handles of the bassinet, raised it to the choir loft, and substituted the Shirley Temple doll for little Sam. Then he lowered it down the same way."

"And nobody *saw* it?"

"The church was dimly lit, especially toward the rear. You and I were facing the altar, as were April and Andre. Only Dr. Lawrence, with his notoriously poor eyesight, was facing the rear. No one saw a thing. The baby's a good sleeper, and there was a better than even

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chance the ascent to the choir loft wouldn't disturb him. It didn't. While we searched the pews, Joe slipped out the side door with the baby, unlocking it with a skeleton key."

"Then *he* called about the ransom?"

"Yes."

"But how did he hope to recover the ransom money after Andre put it on the train?"

"Simple. Andre didn't put it on the train. Joe Curtiss had an identical suitcase filled with old newspapers hidden in the rumble seat of his roadster. That's what he gave Andre to put on the train. The suitcase with the money remained in his rumble seat. By the time we discovered the money was gone, anyone on the train might have made the substitution."

Ivy stood up and walked to the front window. "I think I'd better get back to the inn—Joe will need me."

"You'll be seeing him soon enough, Ivy. There's one other thing. The kidnaping at the church would only have worked if we were seated where we were, just under the choir loft. He knew we'd be there."

"Yes?"

"You picked the pew, Ivy. Just as you shielded the bassinet from me with your body. Just as you produced a suitcase for the ransom money. The two of you had to be in it together. You probably hooked the cord around the bassinet handles so there'd be no delay. And you produced the two identical suitcases for the substitution and suggested that *Joe* drive Andre to the station. I figured I'd find you here because one of you had to keep checking on the baby."

"No! You're crazy if you think I had anything to do—"

As if on cue, there came the sound of a baby crying in the next room.

April saw me walking across the front yard of the Greenbush Inn with little Sam held carefully in my arms. She came running to meet me and there were tears in her eyes.

"He's fine," I told her as I handed the baby over.

"I knew he would be, Sam, with you as his godfather."

"Q"

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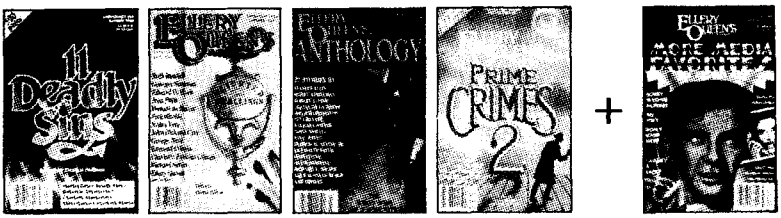

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THE JURY BOX
by JON L. BREEN

The 1932 kidnaping of Charles A. Lindbergh, Jr., has been one of the most written-about of real-life crimes. In its potential for complicated theories and speculations, it rivals the Jack the Ripper murders and the Kennedy assassination. The most tantalizing questions are these: 1) Was Bruno Richard Hauptmann, who was executed for the crime after a well publicized 1935 trial, guilty of murder, of kidnaping, of extortion, or . . . of nothing at all? 2) Was the child whose decomposed body was found not far from the Lindberghs' Hopewell estate really the kidnaped baby? One of the mystery field's most skilled writers of "faction" has taken a new look at the case with provocative results.

**** Max Allan Collins: *Stolen Away: A Novel of the Lindbergh Kidnapping*, Bantam, $21.95 hardcover; $9.95 trade paperback. The four previous Nate Heller novels concerned his exploits as a mob-connected Chicago private eye. This prequel harks back to his early days on the police force, when fame gained from cracking another kidnaping leads to his being called in as a consultant by Lindbergh. Collins's pure storytelling knack and his ability to make real-life figures come alive in fiction are strong as ever. Is his solution the true one? It's impossible to say, but it certainly seems believable within the pages of the novel, and the meticulous bibliographic essay that concludes the book lends an air of authority.

**** Lia Matera: *Prior Convictions*, Simon and Schuster, $17.95. If you've heard reports Matera is one of the most impressive new writers of mystery fiction, this fifth novel about lawyer Willa Jansson should confirm them. Now returned from L.A. to clerk for a federal judge in hometown San Francisco, Willa confronts her family tradition of radical politics, her waning enthusiasm for the law, and (uncharacteristic of series detectives) the psychic damage caused by her earlier brushes with murder. Apart from prose style and character insight few mainstream novels can emulate, the novel has an exceedingly unusual and original mystery plot as well. You must read the book to realize just how clever the title is.

*** Ralph McInerny: *The Search Committee*, Atheneum, $18.95. Matthew Rogerson, philosophy professor at the University of Ohio's fictitious Fort Elbow campus, appeared in two non-mystery novels, *Jolly Rogerson* (1967) and *Rogerson at Bay* (1976), both published before McInerny achieved his greatest renown as the creator of Father Dowling. It would be interesting to know if the whodunit plot that arrives late and is resolved early in this novel was grafted on as an excuse to pitch the book to

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McInerny's mystery audience. In any event, this is the best McInerny novel I've read, and devotees of academic comedy (among mystery readers, most likely the Amanda Cross fans) will enjoy it. When Chancellor Herb Laplace is charged with drunk driving while on his way home from a massage parlor, the search is on for a replacement, and the procedure is nothing like the superficially similar situation in C. P. Snow's *The Masters*. (Academics can take comfort that, absurd as their own campus politics may seem, they surely can't be as outrageous as Fort Elbow's. Can they?)

*** Joseph Hansen: *A Country of Old Men,* Viking, $17.95. This is the twelfth and (per the title page) last mystery about gay detective Dave Brandstetter. Now retired from insurance investigating and experiencing worrisome health problems, Dave takes on the case of a child who may have been kidnaped and the murder of a pernicious rock musician named Cricket Shales. An equally intriguing subplot involves detective novelist Jack Helmers (note the initials), a high school friend of Dave's whose plan to write an autobiographical novel rattles their classmates' cages. This is a typically good Hansen novel, particularly notable for its prose and people. One hopes Hansen, like other writers who have declared an end to their popular series, finds a way to reconsider.

** Mark Richard Zubro: *The Only Good Priest,* St. Martin's, $15.95. If Brandstetter is out of the picture, who will take his place as preeminent active gay male sleuth? My pick is Michael Nava's West Coast lawyer Henry Rios, but also contending are the Chicago team of high school teacher Tom Mason and baseball pitcher Scott Carpenter, blurbed as a "gay Nick and Nora" though the Hardy Boys may be an apter comparison. Their third case, involving a radical lesbian group and the incidence of homosexuality in the Roman Catholic priesthood, is readable enough, but the hackneyed plot development doesn't live up to the unusual and provocative background.

The latest in a distinguished Canadian anthology series is now available. *Cold Blood III* (Mosaic Press, $19.95 hardcover; $12.95 paper), edited by Peter Sellers, includes all new contributions from such prominent names as L. B. Greenwood, Charlotte MacLeod, and Ted Wood. A sampling of the contents illustrates the collection's variety: "On a Day When I'm Brave," a William Bankier tale reminding one of TV-Hitchcock, with only a contrived twist detracting from the penetrating character insights; "Dead Meet," editor Sellers's expert hitman tale, with a final surprise that caught me napping; "The Murder That Couldn't Happen," one of Mel D. Ames's enjoyable pure whodunits about Amazon police lieutenant Cathy Carruthers, who (as the editorial note suggests) would be right at home in a mystery pulp of the thirties and forties; and finally, of special interest to *EQMM* readers, the amazing James Powell's "The Tamerlane Crutch," which (believe

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it or not) is a cross between *The Maltese Falcon* and *A Christmas Carol*. Truthfully, it's not one of his best, but you'll still want to find out how he does it. (The publisher's U.S. distributor is National Book Network, 4720 Boston Way, Lanham, MD 20706).

With so much good mystery fiction being published, more than any single reader or reviewer can possibly cover, book review sources gain in importance. An unpretentious, digest-sized fanzine with some especially well written reviews is *The Criminal Record* (3131 E. Seventh Ave., Denver, CO 80206; $1.25 per issue or six for $7.00), edited and published by Ann M. Williams. The fifteen pages of issue #26 (March 1991) includes such capable critics as Don Sandstrom, P. J. Coldren, Marvin Lachman, William F. Deeck, and editor Williams.

A periodical called *New Mystery* has been reportedly in the works for so long, some in the mystery field have suspected it was a pipedream. Not so, judging by a sampler from the first three bimonthly issues provided by editor-publisher Charles Raisch. Subscriptions will be $37.77 per year ($27.77 introductory, but it's not clear how long that rate is good) from New Mystery Group, 175 Fifth Avenue, Suite 2001, New York, NY 10010. Judging by the contents of the sample issue, ranging from an ambiguous and thought-provoking pure suspense tale by Lawrence Block to a powerful and uncharacteristic short-short by Herbert Resnicow to a so-so one-act play about fifties juvenile gangs by Andrew Vachss, this will be a welcome addition to the field should it survive. Not so welcome is the tendency in the journal's publicity to sneer at the competition. There's room in the crime fiction genre for every taste and no need for the toughs and the cozies to shag insults at each other, if only because so many readers and writers (including some of *New Mystery*'s contributors) have a foot in each camp.

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"Q"

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a *NEW* short story by

JAMES POWELL

Doreen's television lineup included All Adam's Children, The Young and the Upwardly Mobile, *and her particular favorite,* Yesterday's Dark Tomorrow, *which chronicled three generations of the wealthy Brookfield family headed up by old Sterling Brookfield, the crotchety, thatch-headed, good-hearted eccentric, his sons Mark and Buck, and his gentle spinster daughter, the elderly Penny Brookfield, who in many of her mannerisms had recently come to remind Doreen of her dead mother.*

A non-series story by James Powell, whose Department of Firsts story in the April 1966 issue, "The Friends of Hector Jouvet," marked the beginning of an exceptional writing career. He won the 1989 EQMM Readers Award for "A Dirge for Clowntown"—and a collection of some of his most acclaimed stories, A Murder Coming, *was recently published by Yonge & Bloor in Toronto . . .*

YESTERDAY'S DARK TOMORROW

by JAMES POWELL

Doreen opened the Circle Tap at seven every morning just as her father had done until his death. Usually there were one or two men waiting at the door. Her father had spoken of regulars who threw stones up at his bedroom window if he overslept, and as she greeted her first customers of the day Doreen sometimes wondered if these were the same men. Then, weather permitting, she'd prop open the door to get rid of the stale cigarette smoke, using the brick her mother had covered with a shag-rug sample. Before long, a few workers from the night shift at the ceiling-tile plant would arrive.

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Doreen was a heavyset woman with a sweet, small-featured face and a pleasant manner. She missed her parents, who had died within months of each other, and still dreamed about them. She liked to think they'd be pleased she'd kept the place the same. The Circle Tap was a respectable neighborhood bar, a small narrow place with ten stools, two tables for two along the wall, and a table for four in one corner. The bright tablecloths and the paper flowers were her mother's work. The many cards displaying nasal inhalers, combs, lighters, lighter flints, keychains, styptic pencils, lucky charms, and handkerchiefs that shingled the wall on either side of the cash register were her father's. Her mother said he must've run a notions and sundries shop in another life.

By one o'clock, when the small lunch crowd of regulars from the mail-order company down the street had gone, leaving only an old-timer or two at the bar measuring out their day by the drink, Doreen would turn on the television set atop the six-pack cooler and watch her soaps.

Doreen's father always scoffed when she and her mother came out of the kitchen to watch the afternoon soap operas. He called the men talking hairdos and the women talking clothes-horses. But his customers knew it was useless to ask him to change channels.

Doreen wasn't one of those who sends wedding presents when a favorite soap-opera character walks down the aisle or get-well cards when the script calls for the flu. She was level-headed and knew the difference between what she saw on the screen and reality. But the soaps helped pass the time until three o'clock when old Mr. Bell—Ding-Dong, as everyone called him—took over and worked until midnight. Mr. Bell had drunk himself out of several businesses and marriages. He didn't drink now but didn't preach against it. And he knew the bar business.

Doreen's television lineup included *All Adam's Children, The Young and the Upwardly Mobile,* and her particular favorite, *Yesterday's Dark Tomorrow,* which chronicled three generations of the wealthy Brookfield family headed up by old Sterling Brookfield, the crotchety, thatch-headed, good-hearted eccentric, his sons Mark and Buck, and his gentle spinster daughter, the elderly Penny Brookfield, who in many of her mannerisms had recently come to remind Doreen of her dead mother.

Hawthorn Hills, the vast family estate, also boasted a tribe of glamorous, jetsetting grandchildren, including Doreen's favorite character, the tall, blonde, and beautiful Tempest Brookfield, who

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operated her own interior-decorating studio and worked hard teaching minority teenagers to become swank interior decorators, too.

The serpent in that Eden was Faience Brookfield, stylish and soignee widow of Sterling's eldest son, Kale. To the Brookfield clan, Faience was the smiling epitome of sweetness and light, with a weakness for wearing the furs of predatory animals. But Faience had the habit of revealing her innermost thoughts to Billy Bones, her red-and-green parrot. So the audience knew that she was actually the daughter of the Brookfield accountant who died in prison, where he had been sent for embezzlement. It also knew that, using her late husband's stock, forged proxies, and her growing dominance over Penny Brookfield, the vengeful Faience was close to gaining control of Worldwide Global International, the family's far-flung conglomerate.

Doreen would never forget the program when Faience told of her plan to loot the company, turn Hawthorn Hills into a demolition derby track, and throw every last Brookfield out into the street to beg or starve. As the television camera dollied in for a closeup, Faience's face went white with rage, so that even her beauty mark—the dainty little mole on her upper lip at the corner of her mouth—became a thing of menace. "And God help anyone who gets in my way, Billy!" she swore through clenched teeth. Doreen had to admire the actress who played Faience. She sure knew how to give a person the goosebumps.

One afternoon, a stranger entered the Circle Tap and took a seat at the bar. He was in his mid-fifties, with grey, close-cropped hair and a weathered face that must have been quite handsome when he was young. He ordered a draft in a soft-spoken voice and asked if the kitchen was still open. Doreen said it was. He ordered a cheeseburger and when it arrived he thanked her politely. With the cheeseburger halfway to his mouth, he stopped and said, "Nice place you've got here."

Doreen said thank you and, figuring he wanted to talk, she asked, "You from the area?"

"San Diego now," he said, wiping his fingertips one at a time with his paper napkin. "But I was born in Roxanna." Roxanna, the largest city at that end of the county, had something of a rough-and-tumble reputation dating back to its metal-foundry days. "Figured to make it there by lunch, but I hadn't counted on the traffic. I got so hungry, my stomach thought my throat's cut." They both laughed at that

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old expression. It was one Doreen's father liked to use.

By his second draft, the man was telling her about himself. His name was Harold Gray. He'd served twenty-five years as an electrician in the Navy, retiring with a chief petty officer's pension. He'd been married once and divorced. Now he had a small business in San Diego, with two other electricians working for him. He'd come back East for a few days on family business.

Doreen enjoyed their talk. When the man rose to go, she said to come back soon. He smiled and said sure.

It wasn't long after this that a new character appeared on *Yesterday's Dark Tomorrow*. Travis Ravencroft, a Brookfield on his mother's side, a handsome silver-haired man with a wonderful English accent and courtly manners, arrives at Hawthorn Hills after a life of high adventure searching for lost cities, sunken treasure ships, and the hidden wisdom of the ancients. To Doreen's delight, Travis and the shy Penny Brookfield seem drawn to each other with the gentle passion of the no longer young.

But in the course of several episodes, Faience, fearing the loss of her influence over Penny, works to convince Ravencroft that Penny's heart belongs to another and to make Penny believe that Ravencroft is only after her money. But Tempest Brookfield stumbles onto this double-dealing. Recognizing Ravencroft and Penny love one another, she confronts them and, joining their hands together, she says, "Love is life's most precious gift of all. Don't let anyone steal it from you. Particularly someone who is less than she seems." The elderly couple embrace. "I've so much to tell you, darling," says Ravencroft, kissing Penny's fingertips. "Come. I know a little out-of-the-way place where we can be alone."

The episode's final scene shows Tempest in the courtyard, waving as Ravencroft's Jaguar disappears through the porte cochere. Then the camera pulls up and back to Faience Brookfield's bedroom window, where a perfectly manicured hand with Chinese-red fingernails clutches a lace curtain.

The next day around lunchtime, Harold Gray came into the bar with a timid-looking, round-faced woman. They sat down at one of the tables for two. When Doreen went to take their order, Harold introduced his companion as Enid, his late brother's wife. They chose the special, making Doreen regret it wasn't Friday when she made her chicken pot pie, which she liked to think was pretty much the best around.

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Doreen kept an eye on them as best she could in the rush of taking orders and serving her lunch crowd. The two of them smiled a lot and always seemed to be on the verge of touching. Once as she passed, she heard Harold singing the praises of San Diego. As they left, he gave her a big wave from the door and Enid, looking happy, raised a timid hand and fluttered the fingertips. Doreen's answering smile was quick and hectic as she totaled up checks so her lunch crowd could get back to work. But she felt good that they'd come.

A few days after that visit, Harold and Enid showed up at the Circle Tap again, this time in the afternoon right after Mr. Bell arrived. Doreen wasn't much of a drinker, but she sometimes had a champagne cocktail at the end of her day because Mr. Bell made them so well. When Harold saw her at the bar, he invited her to bring her drink and join them. In the course of their conversation, Doreen learned that Harold and Enid had gone steady in high school but had had a big blowup in their senior year when Harold decided to go into the Navy.

"I was wrong—I admit it," said Enid.

"No, honey, you were right," said Harold. "The Navy's no career for a married man. Anyway, I left town in a big huff. Later Enid married my brother George. And here we are." When he said this, Harold reached over and squeezed Enid's hand.

(Meanwhile, back on *Yesterday's Dark Tomorrow,* the action had focused in on a new development, the fateful outcome of the stormy night when Cash Brookfield's sportscar spun out of control on the rain-lashed highway and hit a tree, leaving Cash with no memory of the accident and paralyzed from the waist down and the fiery Tuscany Colville in a coma. Had Cash been behind the wheel? Or had it been Tuscany, fresh from her discovery that Princess Faberge was carrying Cash's baby?)

In the week that followed, Harold and Enid came to the bar practically every other day. And always in the afternoon just as Doreen was getting off work. Harold called the place their little hideaway. Doreen assumed he meant a refuge from the pressures of settling up Harold's mother's estate, which turned out to be the family business he'd mentioned. Harold, his sister Helga, and Enid were to divide the estate among them equally. The principal asset was an old three-story brick building in downtown Roxanna housing the family business, once the largest hardware store for miles around.

As if reading Doreen's thoughts, Harold said, "After Dad died, Helga took over the running of the store and wanted to move every-

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thing out to the new mall on the outskirts of town. But Mother couldn't stand to sell. Her grandfather built that old building with bricks from his own brickyard."

Doreen could understand why they regretted Mrs. Gray's decision. The new mall had turned downtown Roxanna into a ghost with empty storefront eyes.

"Oh, sure," Harold explained gloomily, "we could sell the inventory to the Kernersville Hardware for a big loss, and the mini-storage guy's ready to take the building off our hands for less than a quarter of what it's insured for, but, hell, let's have another drink and change the subject." So they talked about other things.

Then one day Harold smiled at Doreen and announced, "Surprise, surprise. It's official. Enid and I are going to tie the knot and she's coming back to San Diego with me." Enid confirmed his words with a smile. Doreen was delighted.

"But here's the fly in the ointment," said Harold. "Helga's after us to leave our money in the business so she can move it out to the mall. She swears we won't be sorry we did."

"I guess I more or less promised I would," said Enid. "That was before Harold got here."

"You only said you'd think about it, honey," insisted Harold. But then he added, "Still, maybe we should. We owe Helga something for keeping the store going. And I'm not doing too badly out on the Coast and Enid's got other money of her own. But suppose we did, would that really give Helga enough money to pull it off? When I asked her that, she just gave me a wink and said maybe we were in for a little windfall. Whatever the hell that means."

"Your brother George wouldn't have gone to the mall," said Enid with quiet certainty. "George always said a hardware store's got to smell like a hardware store. Everyplace at the mall smells like greeting cards."

"Well, I'll say this," said Harold with a grudging admiration, "if anybody can succeed out at the mall Helga can. There's one very determined person. Don't get caught standing between her and something she really wanted. We kids learned that lesson pretty early on."

"Well, George always said Helga could go too far sometimes," said Enid. Adding: "Like with you-know-who."

"You mean the one George wrote about—her boy friend, the younger guy?" Harold shook his head. "George made him sound like

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one weird customer. He only told me the guy's nickname. What was it? Oddball? Meatball? Hell, honey, I thought that was over away back."

"Not by a long shot," said Enid firmly.

Harold gave that some thought. Then he said, "Well, we're getting far afield here. I say we owe Helga something. But if we leave money in the business, we'll have to put off getting married for a bit. Enid'll have to stay to help Helga with the move out to the mall. And I've just got to get back to San Diego."

Enid took Harold's hand and looked at Doreen earnestly. "What would you do, dear?" she asked.

It seemed the most natural thing in the world for Doreen to echo Tempest Brookfield's wonderful "Love is life's most precious gift of all, don't let anyone steal it from you" speech. What astonished her was to hear herself add, "Particularly someone who is less than she seems."

Harold and Enid looked startled. They exchanged glances.

The very next day the Ravencroft subplot resurfaced on *Yesterday's Dark Tomorrow* when in the closing scene Faience Brookfield stood at the parrot cage and said, "They think they can hide from me, Billy. But I've got a private detective on their tail. And God help Tempest Brookfield if she's mixed up in this. I'll take care of her once and for all!"

As she uttered this threat, she drew from a secret drawer in the bottom of the parrot cage the same elegant little ivory-handled .25-caliber Mauser the police wanted in connection with the murder of both her husband and nightclub owner Kirby Stayn, who had tried to blackmail Faience about her true identity. The woman's face filled the screen like an evil mask. "Yes, I'll fix Miss Goody Two-Shoe's wagon," she hissed, making the parrot turn from its cuttlebone. "Avast there, matey!" it warned.

As the commercials began their loud trudge across the screen, Doreen frowned, remembering how at the conclusion of her dramatic little speech to Harold and Enid the day before she'd heard Mr. Bell's voice and turned around. "Charlie, you want another?" he'd asked for a second time, speaking to the only other customer, a man in a raincoat and a fedora sitting at the bar close to their table. Looking back on it, Doreen had the impression the man hadn't heard the question the first time because he'd been too busy eavesdropping.

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When Mr. Bell arrived to take over, Doreen tried to sound casual when she asked, "Mr. Bell, that man yesterday—the one you called Charlie? He's not a private detective, is he?"

Mr. Bell laughed. "You mean Charlie Casey?" He started to shake his head. Then he stopped and thought for a moment. "Say, now that you mention it, we did razz him good away-back-when for falling for one of those detective correspondence courses they offer in the backs of magazines, where you get a tin badge and a diploma to hang on the wall. No, we didn't call him Fireball because he was strong in the brains department. He won that one for playing with matches. At least that's what the police call it until you're sixteen. After that, it's arson. But Fireball must've changed his ways. I think he works as a night security guard somewhere."

The next morning, a solemn Harold and Enid returned to the Circle Tap and took stools near the kitchen door. Doreen brought them coffee but was called away to the other end of the bar before she could find a way to tell them of her fear that Helga and her boy friend meant to burn down the hardware store for the insurance.

Several minutes later, when she got back to them, Harold insisted on speaking first.

"Right after I left here yesterday, I remembered his nickname—Helga's boy friend," he said grimly. "Suddenly what you said made sense. So I had this little talk with Helga, and another with the lawyer, and we're wrapping things up fast. Kernersville gets the inventory, the mini-storage guy gets the building, and that's the end of it. You really made us see the light."

"You helped us stop Helga from making one big mistake," said Enid.

"You sure did," agreed Harold, getting to his feet. "And if we can't drop back before we go, we'll see you on the next trip through." He smiled. "Count on it."

Doreen watched them go through wet eyelashes. It was as though her parents had come back from the grave to tell her she'd done well.

She thought of nothing else all through the lunch-hour rush. Afterward, there were only two of her old regulars at the bar and one of them was dozing and listing badly to one side.

"Mr. Tunney," she suggested gently to the one who was still alert. "I think you should take your friend Mr. Hermann home." Mr. Tun-

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ney sighed and nodded. "Right you are," he said, putting the man's feed cap on his head and leading him out the door.

Alone, Doreen stared at the door for a moment, smiling to herself. Then she remembered *Yesterday's Dark Tomorrow*. She turned on the television set and found the channel. She was washing glasses with one eye on the complicated lives of Cash Brookfield, Princess Faberge, and Tuscany Colville when the scene switched to Tempest Brookfield working late at the drawing table in her studio. Silently the door behind her swung open to reveal Faience Brookfield, the pistol in her upraised hand.

Doreen stood motionless at the sink, eyes fixed on the screen. Suddenly the bar door opened with a bang. A short, heavy-set woman in slacks and a car coat with a rabbit-fur collar stepped over the threshold. She had a large ugly mole on her upper lip. She saw Doreen. Then she glanced around as if looking for somebody else.

"Can I help you?" asked Doreen.

"Is Doreen around, dear?" said the woman. "I'm in a hurry. My boy friend's double-parked."

"I'm Doreen."

"*You*, dear?" said the woman with disbelief. "*You're* the bitch who's been sticking her nose into Helga Gray's business?" With a shrug of acceptance, she drew a nickel-plated pistol with a grey mother-of-pearl handle from her coat pocket. "Funny, from what I heard, I expected somebody taller and a blonde."

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a *NEW* Inspector Donoghue story by

PETER TURNBULL

"How do we know that she's middle-aged, sir?" Montgomerie asked. "I didn't know that her identity had been ascertained."

"It hasn't," said Donoghue. Rain fell heavily against the window. It was only midday, but the city was dark and the street-lights showed softly yellow in the gloom. "But you've seen her clothing. You saw them at the beach and it was your good self who brought them to the station and put them in the production room . . ."

ONE-WAY TICKET

by PETER TURNBULL

A woman had taken off her clothing. She had left them in a neat pile and had walked barefoot across the sand and into the sea. This the man saw while leashing his dog to prevent a disturbance of the evidence. The man buttoned his coat against the wind and pulled his hat down across his head as yet another hailstorm swept inland from the Clyde. He looked out over the estuary to where the woman had walked: the water was grey-green and foamed at the crest of each wave. Dunoon, on the farther bank, was obscured by mist. The sinister black shape of a nuclear submarine ploughed slowly but resolutely up mid-channel toward the naval base at Faslane. The woman had taken off her clothing, left them in a neat pile, weighed down by a seaweed-slimy rock, and walked across a narrow strip of sand and barefoot into the Clyde. And she had done so in January.

A one-way ticket.

The man walked off the sand, scrambled up the rocky bank between the shore and the coast road. He ran, panting, to McInroy's

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Point, to the office of the ferry operator. He dialed three 9s.

"Nothing, sir," said Montgomerie in answer to Donoghue's question. "We swept the beach from end to end. It's more salt marsh than beach, but nonetheless we swept it from Cloch Lighthouse as far as we could without getting sucked into the marsh. We certainly swept all the stretches of sandy beach and, as I said, nothing."

"Nothing," Donoghue echoed. He glanced up at Montgomerie, twenty-seven years old, chiseled features, downturned moustache. Donoghue found Montgomerie to be a good cop in the sense that he came up with the goods, never embarrassed the department, and didn't blot his copy book, but having said that there was an air of annoying smugness about him, a self-satisfaction, a sense that he was laughing at life. It infuriated Donoghue. That and a definite, distinct, and proven unwillingness to go the second mile.

"Not a thing, sir." Montgomerie leaned on the side of Donoghue's filing cabinet of regulation Scottish Office grey.

"Stand up."

Montgomerie pulled himself up, stung. "We swept with dogs and men. Didn't pick up anything that appeared to be connected with the incident. The dogs didn't pick up a scent."

"I see. What do you think happened, Montgomerie?"

"The lady committed suicide, sir."

Donoghue grunted. "Why do you say that?"

"Well, we won't know that until we have a note, or investigate the circumstances—"

"Don't play games, Montgomerie. You know what I mean. Why do you assume she committed suicide?"

"Her pile of clothes, her footprints leading to the surf."

"As if that is what we are meant to assume."

"Well—"

"You see, for my money, Montgomerie, I don't see why a suicidally depressed, or a suicidally intent person should bother to take off her clothes, let alone leave them in a neat pile weighted down with a rock before walking to her death. The only people who would leave their clothes on the shore and not return are those who wanted only to swim, but were carried away by the current and met their death through misadventure."

"Ah."

"It's too pat, it's too obvious, it's too much what we're supposed to think. A suicidal person would walk into the water fully clothed,

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especially at this time of year. Clothing right about now wouldn't make a great deal of difference to her chances of survival. Preserve her life for about thirty seconds longer than without clothes. So why would a middle-aged lady want to convince the authorities, and who knows who else, that she has killed herself?"

"How do we know that she's middle-aged, sir? I didn't know that her identity had been ascertained."

"It hasn't." Rain fell heavily against the window. It was only midday, but the city was dark and the streetlights showed softly yellow in the gloom. "But you've seen her clothing. You saw them at the beach and it was your good self who brought them to the station and put them in the production room."

"Yes, sir."

"So tell me about them."

"Female clothing, sir. A skirt, a blouse, a coat and hat, underwear—a handbag as well."

"Yes, yes—but tell me about them."

"Well, they seemed to be expensive clothing to my taste. Not designer gear, but quality brand names."

"Good. I had a look at them, too. They were fashionable, but had a sensible feel about them. Not the trendy designer wear of the young, nor yet the therapeutic or support garments of the elderly. They're the garments of a lady in the middle years of life, and as you've pointed out they're of good quality. So the clothing belonged to a middle-aged lady of comfortable means. The clothing size indicates the lady to have been modestly proportioned—not small of stature and certainly not large. A lady who to the perception of an onlooker might appear to have more going for her than most of her generation."

"If she committed suicide, sir, and I would argue that that is still a possibility, then the balance of her mind would have been upset. I once knew a woman personally, she seemed to have everything—a doctor's wife, a career of her own, two sons at university, a fabulous house, not the sort of woman who would willingly swap places with anybody—yet one day she walked down to the bottom of her garden with a length of rope and hanged herself from a tree in the orchard. No sign of foul play, no strange behavior before the incident. She kissed her husband off to work and walked out one autumn morning and strung herself up."

"So you're saying—"

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"What I'm saying is that this may still be a suicide and nothing more."

"We'll see. What's for action?"

"Well, there's plenty of identification in the handbag to be verified. A home address just outside Glasgow, a guest house in Weymess Bay."

"So I noticed." Donoghue reached for his pipe. "There is, of course, no reason why a lady shouldn't book for two nights into a guest house which is just twenty minutes' drive from her home and only ten minutes' drive, if that, from where she left her clothing in a pile under a rock, but it still strikes one as odd, does it not?"

"It does," Montgomerie conceded, still standing somewhat stiffly.

"How much money was in the handbag? About twenty pounds, I think?"

"Twenty-three pounds and some small change."

"Just the amount you'd expect. So nothing unusual there."

"No, sir. She had a cashline card. If she wanted more, she could easily have gotten more."

"And it's still not yet lunchtime." Donoghue smiled. "Work for both of us in the P.M."

"Yes, sir," said Montgomerie stiffly.

"How did she impress you?" Montgomerie stood in the hall, savoring the guest-house cleanliness and the solid wood desk and the ledger names.

"How do you mean, son? She really didn't say anything to impress me. She was just a lady. She wanted a room for two nights and paid in advance. In cash."

"Cash."

"Folding green in the hand. It's not usual, but always welcome. It doesn't all have to go through the books that way." The woman was small, wiry-haired, warm of personality as landladies went, so far as Montgomerie could recall from his student days. He recalled icy viragos serving cold porridge and pestering him for money. The Bay View Guest House was a good deal cleaner and warmer than the lodgings of his youth. The grandfather clock in the hallway chimed 2:30 P.M.

"What was her manner like?"

"Polite. A bit snobbish, but friendly enough in a patronizing sort of way. But not a difficult guest by any means. Seen some I've had,

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son, a kennel would be too good for them. Some of the messes I've had to clear up—"

"Yes. Did she say why she had booked the room?"

"She didn't and I didn't ask. Sorry, but if I'd known what she was intending to do I'd have paid more attention."

"So you know about the incident up the coast?"

"Well, the lady at the grocery store, she has a sister in Glasgow who has a son who—"

"All right. So no strange behavior, nothing said or done that might make you think something was amiss?"

"No, son."

"The lady—Mrs. Grant—she seemed happy with life? Not the kind of contentment you read about some people experiencing just before they commit suicide?"

"She seemed content," said the landlady. "She had a confident manner, as if looking forward to something. I remember the keenness in my daughter's eyes before she went to university. She—Mrs. Grant—had the same sort of look about her."

"Eager anticipation?"

"I couldn't put it better myself, son."

"May I look at her room?"

"Certainly. But she hasn't left anything behind her."

"That's interesting." Montgomerie followed the landlady up the carpeted stairway.

Were it not for the crumpled bed linen, the room would be ready for immediate occupation by the next guest. "I checked all the drawers," said the landlady primly. "All empty."

Montgomerie checked anyway. The landlady was right. There was nothing anywhere. It wasn't the room of a recent suicide victim. It was the room of somebody moving out, and moving on.

"She went to make a phone call," the landlady said matter-of-factly.

"Oh?" Montgomerie turned. "Tell me."

"Well—" The woman glanced around the room as if searching for a memory jog. Montgomerie followed her gaze: a crucifix above the bed, a very old tapestry of a sailing ship above the dresser, the window that looked onto the estuary. The crumpled bed on which the mysterious Mrs. Grant had slept. "Well," she said again, "it was on the first night of her stay, the night before last. She booked in friendly as you please and asked where the nearest phone was. 'In the hall,' I tells her—there's a pay phone downstairs in the hall. No,

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says she, she'd prefer privacy. Well, as if I'm one to gossip!

"Well, be like that, madam, I says to myself—if you want to walk out on a cold and windy night, that's your business. So I told her there was a public kiosk on the head of the jetty, nine times out of ten it's not working. But off she goes—and back she comes looking like the cat that got the cream, so I suppose she got the phone on the one in ten times it was working. She went off to her bed early and I never saw her again."

"No?"

"No, she went out at ten P.M. or thereabouts, made her phone call, came back, and went to her room. She had breakfast in the morning, but I always sleep in on Monday morning and my husband does the breakfasts. She spent all day in her room and left at ten P.M."

"Ten P.M. again?"

"Yes, I heard her go out. I didn't hear her come back in. I didn't realize she was missing until she didn't appear for breakfast. I didn't go up to her room right away—I went to the shops and heard that a woman had drowned herself in the Clyde. Still didn't realize it was her until you called."

"Is your husband in? I'd like to speak to him."

"He's in Glasgow. He'll not be back until late."

"How did Mrs. Grant arrive here, do you know?"

"Train." The answer was very confident. "I don't know for absolute certainty, but we have no car-parking facilities, so we don't get many motorists staying here. In winter, we don't get many motorists at all. By the time she arrived, the Rothesay ferry had stopped running so she hadn't come across the water. The bus from Glasgow arrives on the hour, the train on the half hour. Being as she knocked on the door a little after nine-thirty P.M., I presumed she had arrived by train."

"Fair enough," Montgomerie conceded. "How would she have got to the Tail of the Bank from here?"

"Bus. If she hadn't got a car, then she would have gone by bus. The express to Glasgow goes by the inland route, but there's also a service bus which follows the coast road. There's a stop close to the Tail of the Bank, near to the Cloch Lighthouse. That's where my husband alights when he goes fishing on Tuesdays. That's his day off."

Montgomerie walked away from the guest house, head down against the wind, hands thrust deep inside the pockets of his foul-weather jacket, the kind that is designed for the mountains but is

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in fact more often seen in Sauchiehall Street in the cloakrooms of chic wine bars. As he walked, Montgomerie had to admit that Donoghue was probably correct: this didn't look like a suicide. It began to look like a naked attempt to disappear and a clumsy attempt to make the disappearance appear to be a suicide.

It began to smell.

Mrs. Grant's house was a house of palatial splendor. It was a massively constructed stone-built late-Victorian house with parklands rather than gardens, with outbuildings and stables and a gardener's cottage near the gates. The approach to the house was a long straight gravel-covered drive, which Donoghue presumed was an efficient and proven burglar-deterrent as much as it was a hard-wearing surface—the sound of the tires of his car crunching the stuff he found embarrassingly loud. He fancied that as he drew near to the door the sound of his tires on the gravel couldn't fail to be heard inside the house.

And so they appeared to have been. As Donoghue opened the door of his car, so, too, was opened the front door of the house. A middle-aged woman in a maid's uniform stood on the threshold, her hands clasped in front of her. She looked to be serious-minded and she looked troubled.

"D.I. Donoghue." Donoghue approached the steps.

"Please come in, sir." The woman stepped aside. "Thank you for your phone call."

Donoghue stepped into the hallway. He found the house to be warm in terms of its heating, but it had an all-pervading chill of human coldness. The hallway was dimly lit and had a heavy smell of polish.

"If you'd like to follow me, please."

The maid led Donoghue down a narrow passage. Halfway along the passage she said, "Watch the stairs, please," otherwise she spoke not a word. The passage opened into a kitchen that was larger and wider than the living room in Donoghue's Edinburgh bungalow. The kitchen had a large gas range, a table which took up most of the floor space, and utensils hanging from the wall. "I'm well aware of my place in the scheme of things, Mr. Donoghue. The kitchen is the only place I feel comfortable and 'at home.' "

"I quite understand," said Donoghue.

"So it's about madam?"

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"Mrs. Grant, yes," Donoghue nodded. "She may have committed suicide, I'm afraid, but we believe that there may be more to it than that, more than meets the eye."

"That wouldn't surprise me," said the maid without giving away any emotion. "There's always more to that one than meets the eye. She's fly—flyer than a barrelload of monkeys."

"Oh?"

"Aye," she said matter-of-factly. "I don't like madam and I don't mind who knows it. I stay because of my age. I couldn't get another position, and there are few positions to be had, anyway. Folk can't afford paid help these days, and then there are all these electric gadgets nowadays to do a lot of our work."

"So you'd be surprised if Mrs. Grant had done away with herself?"

"I'd not believe it. She had too much to live for. She was scheming at something."

"What makes you say that, Mrs.—?"

"Sara, without an 'h'. I'm addressed as Sara, if you please, sir. I was Sara when I entered service straight from the home at fourteen years. Now I'm fifty-nine in September and I'm still Sara."

"Sara." Donoghue felt as if he was stepping back one hundred years. "What makes you say that Mrs. Grant was scheming at something?"

"I live in the house the same as her do. Even if I am in service and she's not, we're still under the same roof. Well, in the first place her name isn't Grant. Grant is her maiden name. She reverted to it soon after her husband was murdered. Her real name is McEnroe."

"Her husband was murdered?"

"Strangled in his bed in this house. I found him, so I did. They never caught the man that did it."

"Where was Mrs. Grant or McEnroe at the time of the murder?"

"Visiting relatives in New Zealand. You don't get a better alibi than that."

"It doesn't mean she wasn't implicated," said Donoghue.

"That's what I've thought all along, sir."

"Can you recall much of the incident?"

"Well, it was in all the papers, sir. Martin McEnroe, he was an accountant, retired—"

"An elderly man?"

"Seventy-two years, hale and healthy. He'd have seen a hundred, if you ask me, sir."

"A lot older than Mrs. McEnroe."

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"By nearly thirty years," said Sara. "He pulled her out of the gutter and made her a lady. She had the same background as me—was even raised in the same awful home. He made the wrong choice. If he had married me, I'd have made him a real wife."

"She gained from his death?"

"Handsomely. This house, all his money. Sold his share of the partnership. He had retired but he retained a financial stake."

"I see."

"She benefited in other ways as well."

"Oh?"

"Well, she was then able to enjoy Ron, her young man, quite openly instead of seeing him on the quiet."

"Now you do intrigue me."

"She had been seeing young Mr. Ron for three or four years before Mr. McEnroe was murdered."

"He's younger than she is?"

"About ten years."

"Employed?"

"Off and on. I believe he calls himself a singer. When he can get work, he sits and sings in nightclubs. When he can't get work, he sits in m'lady's bath and sings. Most often he sings in the bath."

"And, as you say, quite openly."

"Yes, sir. He shares madam's attitude to me—that is to say, he doesn't think that I exist."

"A dangerous attitude."

"I think it's dangerous."

"So Mrs. Grant or McEnroe is a very rich woman."

"Indeed she is."

"Any children?"

"No, sir."

"Other relatives?"

"No, sir. They were both on their own. You'll be asking me what is to become of the property and why should she walk out on an immensely valuable piece of property."

"If she walked out. But, yes, I was beginning to form thoughts along those lines." Donoghue found his voice echoing in the huge kitchen.

"Well, sir, I've seen some papers—documents—lying around. The letterhead is a company called Allied and Merchant of Inverness. A financial institution—I believe they have an office in Glasgow. Mrs. McEnroe is quite a careless woman. As indeed is young Mr. Ron."

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"Oh?"

The maid turned and opened a drawer in a Welsh dresser next to the kitchen door. She took out a camera and, holding it by the strap, she handed it to Donoghue. As he made to take hold of the camera, she pulled it back toward her.

"Hold it by the strap," she said with a note of authority. "I've been doing so in case I smudge any fingerprints. I have a small TV in my room and I watch detective films."

Donoghue took hold of the camera strap.

"It's not for me to say what happened to Mrs. McEnroe, but I live in this house and the fingerprints on that camera might be of use to the police. The camera belongs to Mr. Ron. He left it here. He leaves a lot of things here. He's very careless—they're both very careless."

"Thank you." Donoghue held the camera up and read an address label. The equipment belonged to one Ron Black of an address in Govan. "Thank you," he said again.

Donoghue drove back to Glasgow, the camera beside him on the passenger seat. He pulled his Rover into the car park at the rear of P Division police station at Charing Cross and entered the building by the rear Staff Only door. He signed in, checked his pigeonhole for messages, and went upstairs to the CID corridor. He entered his office, took off his hat and coat, and sitting at his desk he picked up the phone and dialed a two-figure internal number.

"Have Bothwell come to my office, please," he said. He replaced the receiver, picked it up again, and dialed another two-figure number.

"Collator? Good. Two things: first, Mr. Bothwell, our forensic chemist, will be handing some fingerprints down to you later this afternoon. They may be relevant to the case of Martin McEnroe—he was an elderly man who was strangled in his sleep about two years ago. Second thing: can you have a file on the murder sent up to my office? Thank you." He replaced the receiver and for a third time dialed an internal number.

"Montgomerie? Can you come to my office?" He glanced at the clock on the wall. Three-thirty P.M. "Yes—now, please." He replaced the receiver, dialed a nine for an outside line and then an Edinburgh number.

"Hello, it's me. I'm sorry, but I'll be late home this evening. —Look, I'm not happy about it, either. —Very well." He put the

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receiver down heavily just as Bothwell came into the office, knocking on the open door, blinking heavily behind his thick-lensed spectacles.

"Mr. Bothwell," said Donoghue.

"Sir?"

"This camera." Donoghue picked it up by the strap and handed it to Bothwell. "See what prints you can lift and send them to the collator a.s.a.p."

"Sir."

"It's a murder inquiry and so takes priority over anything else that you're doing at the present."

"Very good, sir."

Bothwell and Montgomerie collided with each other on the threshold of Donoghue's office and "sorry," "sorry"ed their way around each other.

"How did you get on with the landlady?" Donoghue asked, this time indicating for Montgomerie to sit down.

Sitting, Montgomerie told him.

"Not the behavior of a suicidal person."

"Not at all, sir."

"More like the behavior of someone eagerly starting out on a new life." Donoghue lit his pipe. "Which is probably where she is going at the moment."

"Oh?"

"Yes, it's a murder inquiry. At least it's shaping up that way and I find myself sharing the suspicions of Mrs. Grant's domestic help, Sara. Mrs. Grant is in fact Mrs. McEnroe, whose husband Martin was strangled in his sleep about two years ago."

"I recall the case," Montgomerie said. "The intruder had a key, there was no sign of a break-in. He did the job, left fingerprints all over the place, and left. He didn't even attempt to make it look like a burglary. A very careless man."

"You're not the first person to make that observation," said Donoghue. "It seems that Mrs. Grant or McEnroe has a young friend—Ron Black by name. She was seeing him on the quiet before Mr. McEnroe was murdered and saw much more of him afterward. She was Down Under when the murder took place, in New Zealand, but it would have been a simple matter to give her lover a set of house keys."

"Bump off the old man, take his lolly, and go off with her toy boy. Fake your own suicide to avoid suspicion."

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"It's been done before and apparently neither Black nor Mrs. McEnroe has any relatives that might complicate matters." Donoghue reached for the phone. "The thing that puzzles me is how she was going to realize all the money tied up in that huge house of hers. You can't take that with you if you're going to fake your suicide."

"She has to live to collect it somehow."

"Exactly." Donoghue spoke into the phone. "Directory Enquiries, please, a Glasgow number. Allied and Merchant Finance Company." Donoghue scribbled on his notepad as the automated voice spoke and then dialed the number he had been given.

Montgomerie listened as Donoghue explained the problem to the official at Allied and Merchant. Ten minutes elapsed and eventually Donoghue said, "Thank you very much, sir." He replaced the receiver. "Simple." He smiled at Montgomerie. "Simple and ingenious. It seems that A & M have developed a scheme along with other finance houses in response to Britain's aging population. It's designed to help people who are rich in terms of property or assets but poor in terms of hard cash. Simply put, A & M buys the house from the owner for the current market price, thus releasing all the cash tied up in the bricks and mortar. The occupier continues to live in it for the rest of his life and A & M, being the actual owner, undertakes to keep up the repair of the property. When the owner dies or is obliged to go into an elderly-persons home, the finance company assumes occupation and sells the property, thus recovering their money and with a handsome profit."

"Put your money in property: they don't make it any more."

"Exactly—it's a fair deal. The elderly person gets to live out his or her life amid familiar surroundings with no money worries, and the finance company looks after the property—they have to, otherwise they couldn't sell it again. The finance company gets a higher return on their investment than otherwise, and with little or no risk."

"Neat."

"The gentleman to whom I spoke remembered Mrs. McEnroe contacting the company and asking to make use of the scheme. The board had a heated debate, because at forty-three she was far too young to be considered for the scheme. The company normally only deals with pensioners. In the event, apparently, they agreed because at the time they had money to invest and because Mrs. McEnroe was willing to sell for a sum which, even though it was considerable

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in itself, was a steal in terms of the actual value of the property. The deal went through about eighteen months ago, which means that Mrs. McEnroe requested the finance company buy the house shortly after Mr. McEnroe's murder. The money was deposited in a bank in Auckland, New Zealand, in the name of Grant."

"Well, well."

"I imagine we'll also find that Mrs. McEnroe has over the last few months systematically transferred all her capital to the same bank and has got a passport in the name of Grant, using her birth certificate. Careless of her to use the name Grant too early. If she had stuck to McEnroe we couldn't have got the lead we did."

"But as it is, Mrs. McEnroe, fabulously wealthy widow, drowns in a suicide attempt and Miss Grant, orphan girl, goes to New Zealand to start a new life for herself."

"And most likely travels with a Mr. Black, unsuccessful night-club singer who, by sheer coincidence, is also starting a new life for himself."

"Perhaps they'll meet and live happily ever after," Montgomerie grinned. "Just bump into each other and fall in love. I mean, they're both from the same part of the world."

The phone on Donoghue's desk rang. He picked it up and listened. "Good—good, I thought they would." He replaced the phone. "The prints that we could not identify in the bedroom two years ago—"

"They're the same as the prints on the camera belonging to Mr. Black of Govan."

"Correct. Let's pay him a visit. He won't be there, he'll be on his way to New Zealand, but we'll see what sort of gifts he's left behind for us."

Ron Black had left little behind. His flat had been vacated. It had For Sale signs in the window.

"Handy, that is," said Donoghue. He and Montgomerie drove to the estate agents' and picked up the keys. They asked to see the manager privately.

"We have to send the money from the sale to a bank in New Zealand," he said, perplexed by the police interest.

"We'd like to keep hold of the keys, sir," said Donoghue. "Until our enquiries are complete. We'd like our forensic chemist to go over the property."

"I'll have to ask you for a receipt, sir."

"No problem at all," said Donoghue . . .

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In the flat, which was stripped of all furnishing, Donoghue and Montgomerie saw a telephone number written on bare plaster in pencil. Donoghue picked up the phone. "Still connected," he smiled, and dialed the number. A prerecorded voice told him that he had phoned Qantas Airways and was being held in a queue. Music then played. A few seconds later a voice with a South of England accent said, "Qantas Airways. Can I help you?"

"Police, Glasgow," said Donoghue.

"Yes, sir," the voice snapped.

"Can you tell me if two passengers with the names of Grant and Black are traveling to Australia or New Zealand today or later this week?"

"I'm not at liberty to divulge that sort of information, sir."

"This is a murder enquiry."

"I understand, sir, but I have no proof of your identity."

"That's fair enough. You could phone back with the information." Donoghue gave the official the number of P Division police station. "Say the information is for the attention of D.I. Donoghue."

"I'm sure we can help you, sir, but I'll have to clear this first with my superior."

Donoghue and Montgomerie drove back to P Division. Rain fell heavily. They signed in and checked their respective pigeonholes for messages. A slip of paper lay folded in Donoghue's pigeonhole. He read it and handed it to Montgomerie.

It was from Qantas Airways with compliments. "Passengers Grant and Black are booked on flight Q A 001 at Manchester for London, Bahrain, Singapore, and Sydney. They are booked forward onto flight Q A 021 Sydney to Auckland. Flight departs Manchester at 17.00 and Heathrow at 18.00 hrs, this day. One-way tickets."

"Seventeen-forty," Donoghue said, glancing at the clock above the uniform bar.

"We could still pick them up, sir." Montgomerie spoke eagerly.

Donoghue shook his head. "No," he said. "No, they're not going anywhere."

"Not going anywhere! New Zealand isn't anywhere?"

"I rather like Qantas, Montgomerie. I've flown with them a few times. If we do as you suggest, the flight will lose its slot and two hundred-plus people will be greatly inconvenienced."

"They're getting away!"

"No, they're not. The long arm of the law can reach to the other side of the world if necessary, and it can do so with considerable

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ease. We'll let Miss Grant and her young friend enjoy full in-flight hospitality and both you and I can get home at a reasonable time. What you can do before you leave the station is telex the Australian police via Interpol and ask them to have the Man in Blue meet flight Q A 001 at Sydney."

"Yes, sir."

"Ask for passengers Grant and Black to be detained pending extradition proceedings in connection with the murder of Mr. Martin McEnroe."

DETECTIVERSE

PROBABLE CAUSE

by GLORIA ROSENTHAL

He was a con man through and through,
Who lied and stole and cheated, too—
Sold phony stock to all his friends
And never tried to make amends.
Sold flooded land and then, alas,
Some diamonds that were really glass.
And then one day they found him dead
With bullet holes in heart and head.
A knife was sticking in his side—
Around his neck a rope was tied.
The M.E. said, "A natural death—"
And then he said, without a breath,
"It's just as clear as it can be
That someone killed him, *naturally*."

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MURDER THEY WROTE

by ANN BAYER AND MARGARET WEISS

Emma lived in 14-O, Duffy in 6-E;
They visited back and forth, going vertically.
Both had ears that were velvety brown,
Only Duffy's went up and Emma's went down.
One afternoon not long ago
Duffy was at Emma's in 14-O.
They did what they liked best to do:
Sit by the window and stare at the view.
(Their building was shaped in such a way
That 14-O faced 14-A.)
A terrier does not scare easy,
But what they witnessed made them queasy:
A man's silhouette seizing a knife
And plunging it into the back of his wife.

Emma's owner, who had missed the tableau,
Took them to dinner at 6-E below.
Duffy's owners, Anna Maria and John,
Couldn't believe such carryings on.
Each dog was being an absolute hellion.
"Spaghetti'll calm them," said A.M. in Italian.
Seeing the pasta, Duffy stopped yelping
And dug into his great big helping.
"Duffy," cried Emma, "are you out of your head?
How can you eat when a woman lies dead?
We must find a way to let it be seen
A killer is loose on floor fourteen."
Then suddenly it came to Emma:
Spaghetti itself could solve the dilemma!

A few minutes later, the three humans gaped
At a wobbly message the dogs had shaped:

WIF IN 14-A BEN STABBBED
HUSBEN GILTY MUS BE NABBBED

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The five of them raced to the elevator.
There inside stood the perpetrator!
Emma growled and Duffy snapped,
Both doing their best to keep him trapped.
Seeing him cower behind a trunk,
John shouted at the no-good punk:
"If what's in that trunk is one bit gory,
You're a goner—end of story!"

The cops were called, the lid was pried,
A woman's corpse was found inside.
The man got life without parole;
The dogs got a beribboned scroll.
Named honorary police lieutenants,
They're respected by their fellow tenants.
Toward suspects they remain ferocious.
Their spelling, though, is still atrocious.

© *1991 by Ann Bayer and Margaret Weiss.*

"Q"

ON OUR COVER

Emma, the inspiration (along with her friend Duffy) for "Murder, They Wrote," is a four-year-old Norfolk terrier. Her remarkable ability to express herself in writing may come from having been born on Jane Austen's birthday (December 16th) and being named after the title character of one of Austen's novels. She shares a Manhattan apartment with Ann Bayer, who has written for *Life, Harper's*, and *The New York Times* and whose story "A Pleasure To Deal With" came in second in the vote for the 1987 EQMM Readers Award. Emma often drops in on her friend Pegggy, who lives a few blocks away. Margaret Weiss, formerly the photography editor of *Saturday Review* and author of several books on the visual arts, has been trying to get Emma to take the extra "g" out of her name but so far without success.

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a *NEW* Black Widowers story by

ISAAC ASIMOV

"Well, don't ask David where his shop is located," said Halsted, "he probably doesn't remember. But I do and I'll write it down for you, Jim. It's really an interesting collection he has—you'll enjoy it."

Gonzalo looked impatient. He said, "I'm the grill-master and I don't want to go any deeper into the collection right now. During the meal, Mr. Rose said he belonged to some group which I think he was going to compare to the Black Widowers."

"Well, yes, I was," said Rose.

"Good. You are now free to do so."

Black Widowers story #66! Number 1—"The Acquisitive Chuckle"—especially beloved by Henry admirers, appeared in the January 1972 issue of EQMM . . .

THE GUEST'S GUEST

by ISAAC ASIMOV

The man looked down at his hand and said to the waiter who was standing at the head of the stairs, "The Milano Restaurant, Fifth and Eighteenth, second floor. Right?"

"Perfectly correct, sir," said the waiter smoothly. "And you, I take it, are Mr. Halsted's guest."

"That's right. Roger invited me." He handed his umbrella to the waiter, together with his hat and so on, and carefully removed his coat. "You won't mind checking these for me, Waiter?"

"Not at all. We have a small cloakroom for the special use of the Black Widowers on the occasion of their monthly banquet."

"Good, good—I hope I'm not too late."

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"Not at all, sir. The Widowers are all here, but they are still in the cocktail hour. May I bring you something to drink?"

"A dry martini, if you don't mind. —In there?"

"That's right, sir."

The man walked in and Roger Halsted, who was obviously on the lookout, said, "Ah, there you are, David. I was going to give you five more minutes before I started worrying."

"No need," said the guest. "I had absolutely no trouble except for the traffic. It's a little sloshy outside and there's something about even a trace of wet snow that seems to slow everything up."

"So it does," said Halsted. "Here, let me introduce you, David. Fellow Black Widowers, this is my friend, David S. Rose, and you will have to forgive him if, after I introduce all of you, he doesn't remember your names. David is the most absent-minded person I know.

"David, this tall drink of water with the ferocious eyebrows is Geoffrey Avalon, a patent attorney. This short drink of water with a beard he should be ashamed of is Emmanuel Rubin, a mystery writer. This fellow with the greyish-white hair and the scowl is Thomas Trumbull. He works for the government in something he's too ashamed to describe. This one with the little moustache that looks like a smear of dirt is James Drake, a retired chemist. Finally, there's this one who's dressed to kill, and whose color combinations sometimes make us sick. He's Mario Gonzalo, an artist."

"And there's Henry," said Gonzalo.

"Oh, right. Our most important member. Henry, our esteemed waiter, without whom no meeting could possibly be held."

Avalon said, in his startling baritone, "Would Mr. Rose care to repeat our names and thus, perhaps, affix them in his memory?"

Rose laughed. "I'd love to try, but I'd fail. It's all I can do to remember Roger's name. As the evening wears on, I may catch onto the names. Sometimes I do."

"I mean it," said Halsted. "He's got the world's worst memory. Whenever he goes somewhere, his wife has to pin his destination to his shirt so that passers-by can help him when he gets lost."

"It's not that bad," said Rose.

David Rose made a rather startling appearance. He was nearly six feet tall, but gave the impression of stockiness. He had bright-red hair, center-parted, and a bright-red beard of moderate length. He had the freckles to go with it, and he wore tortoiseshell glasses that lent him a definitely old-fashioned air. He was clearly an amia-

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ble fellow, however, and didn't seem the least put out by Halsted's teasing.

Nor did he seem shy or withdrawn. The conversation returned to where it had been before he had arrived, and it consisted of the nearly inevitable discussion of the Persian Gulf crisis, and of Rubin's loud insistence that Saddam Hussein had to be wiped off the face of the ancient Land of the Two Rivers.*

Avalon rumbled, "Who would disagree with you, were it not that we must ask what the consequences would be? Macbeth says, 'If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well it were done quickly.' The question is that when it is done, would it indeed be done in the sense that there would be no new problems arising that would be worse than the problem we thought we were solving?"

Rose said, "If we're going to quote Shakespeare, remember that Hamlet says that not knowing what lies ahead 'puzzles the will and makes us rather bear those ills we have than fly to others that we know not of. Thus conscience doth make cowards of us all.' "

Avalon said, "It's not cowardly to consider war only as the last resort, or to pause and think things out very carefully before doing anything that may not prove retrievable."

Rubin said, "It's fight him now as he is, or fight him later when he's worked up nuclear weapons."

The argument grew more heated until Henry's quiet voice said, "Gentlemen, dinner is served."

It wasn't long after Thanksgiving and what the Black Widowers sat down to was the traditional feast. It began with melon and prosciutto, followed by a large bowl of lobster bisque, a salad, and then the inevitable roast turkey, with chestnut stuffing, cranberry sauce, yams, and string beans, and pumpkin pie—or, for those who preferred it, strawberry shortcake. There were also several kinds of breads and rolls, together with generous pats of butter, plus coffee or tea ad libitum.

Roger Halsted, who knew what was coming, used host's privilege to put an end to the Persian Gulf discussion. He said, "We will, one and all of us, get indigestion if we argue out the thing while eating. Let's talk about something else."

ED. NOTE: This story was written before war officially began.

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And, of course, he had no sooner said that than a deadly silence fell on the table, as no one appeared able to think of a suitable topic.

David Rose grinned, his eyes glinting through his tortoiseshells. "Well, let me start then. This group meets every month, I take it."

"Absolutely. Right here in the Milano," said Avalon, "and we've done so for decades."

"And this is the full number of members? Or are some missing?"

"One or two have died," said Avalon, "or have moved far away from the city, and they have been replaced. We six, however, and Henry are the full number right now and our identity has remained unchanged now for twenty years, though we are one and all of us growing rather precariously old."

"It's delightful," said Rose. "I belong to a group that—"

Gonzalo raised his hand. "You can't talk about yourself during dinner, Mr. Rose. That's for afterward, when we grill you."

"Grill me?" For a moment he looked puzzled. Then he turned toward Halsted. "I remember now, Roger. You warned me about that."

Halsted smiled. "I'm amazed you do remember. But don't worry—it won't hurt."

"I'm not worried," said Rose.

Henry had cleared the table and was serving the concluding brandy when Halsted rattled his spoon against the water glass and said, "Gentlemen, the time has come for grilling our worthy guest. Mario, suppose you take over the task of grill-master."

"Sure," said Gonzalo. He turned to their guest. "We have your name, Mr. Rose, but what we'd like to know is what you do for a living."

Rose said, "I'm a printer. I make a pretty fair living out of it, but what really gives my life meaning is that I'm a book collector. Not an undiscriminating one, of course. No one would have enough room to collect books indiscriminately. What I collect are old books on chemistry, pre-Lavoisier."

Gonzalo looked puzzled at the final word, but said, "Does that mean you're a chemist, Mr. Rose?"

Rose shook his head. "Not at all. I just like those old books and their old woodcuts of chemical instruments, their old ways of describing chemical experiments and so on. I have a number of medieval books on alchemy, too." He felt about his clothing. "I don't think I remembered to bring my card-case, but you're welcome to visit my

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establishment and look at the books yourselves if you want to. —Come to think of it, wasn't one of you introduced as a retired chemist?"

Drake coughed through the smoke of his cigarette and said, "That was I. I'd love to look at your collection."

"Yes," said Halsted, "well, don't ask David where his shop is located, he probably doesn't remember. But I do and I'll write it down for you, Jim. It's really an interesting collection he has—you'll enjoy it."

Gonzalo looked impatient. He said, "I'm the grill-master and I don't want to go any deeper into the collection right now. During the meal, Mr. Rose said he belonged to some group which I think he was going to compare to the Black Widowers."

"Well, yes, I was," said Rose.

"Good. You are now free to do so," said Gonzalo. "Go ahead."

"Thank you," said Rose. "I belong to a group called the Thursday Lunch and, as the name implies, we meet every Thursday for lunch—at the Arts Club, actually. It's a very nice group of slightly superannuated gentlemen—rather like yourselves. In fact, last Thursday I just happened to witness the simultaneous arrival of three of the more important of the Thursday Lunchers, each one with his cane, struggling up the stairs toward the front door. I couldn't help but think that the cane is our mark of distinction."

"How many attend the luncheon?" asked Gonzalo.

"Actually, anywhere from fifty to ninety, depending on the weather and on the nature of the speaker."

"You have speakers, then?"

"Oh, yes. We begin the meeting at noon and there's a half-hour cocktail period. At twelve-thirty sharp, luncheon is served. At one-fifteen P.M., our entertainer is introduced—someone who sings or plays an instrument—and at one-thirty we have our speaker. At two P.M., we break up. The whole thing lasts only two hours, but it's all very congenial and it's the high point of the week for most of us—certainly for me."

"How long have you been a member?" asked Trumbull suddenly.

"Nineteen years. The club was founded in nineteen-oh-five, so it has a longish history as such things go."

"What are the qualifications for entry?" asked Gonzalo.

"To start with, it was a group of newspapermen who met for lunch every Thursday, and for a while it was intended for newspapermen only. However, you know how these clubs tend to expand. We now

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consider ourselves a group of communicators. Anyone who is engaged in reaching the public with information of some sort or other qualifies. This means the group now includes writers of all sorts—editors, publishers, members of the visual media, artists, and so on. I qualify primarily because I'm a printer, though being a book collector also helps.

"As a matter of fact," Rose went on, "being a printer makes me a particularly useful TL-er, since we put out an annual book in connection with our annual banquet."

"What kind of book?" asked Avalon.

"Nothing elaborate. It lists all the members, with photographs of many of them. It contains some essays—our president is a well known writer and can be counted on to contribute—and artwork, photographs of all our guests, a list of those members who died in the past year, and so on. I print it without charge and, believe me, the money the club saves in this way is vital."

"But it's money you lose," said Drake.

"Well, money isn't everything, to coin a phrase. The pleasure I get out of the Thursday Lunch restores the balance to my favor and, to be absolutely truthful, the fact that they rather fawn on me for my free printing is also pleasant. But that's just among us, please."

Avalon said gravely, "I hope Roger assured you that anything said at a Black Widowers meeting is considered a privileged communication and never passes beyond these walls."

"So he did," said Rose.

By now, Gonzalo was twitching a little, and scowling. "Listen, Mr. Rose, is there anything about this club of yours that's upsetting you?"

"Upsetting me?" Rose looked surprised. "I can't say there is."

"No little mystery, no little puzzle, nothing that you can't quite explain."

Rose's expression of surprise deepened. "Not at all. Is there supposed to be?"

Avalon said soothingly, "Pay no attention to Mario, Mr. Rose. He's never happy unless there's a puzzle at hand. The rest of us don't require it. —Tell me, what kind of speakers does your club have?"

"It's always been difficult to find speakers. We don't pay, and the audience is less than a hundred and is, by and large, not composed of important and famous people, for all that we're communicators. However, we've had a very good and enthusiastic man in charge of

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entertainment over the last few years and he gets us some good people—mayors, senators, military men, industrialists, and so on. Actually—and this is something else I wouldn't want repeated—I find the list of speakers a little too much weighted toward the conservative side to suit me, but usually not offensively so. Some years ago, a public figure I found offensively to the right agreed to speak, and that was one of the few meetings I refused to attend."

"Are guests sometimes invited?"

"Oh, yes, that's important. Every guest has to be paid for, so that a good supply of guests not only fleshes out the attendance but the money intake. I once invited Roger to attend one of our luncheons—I'll leave it to him to tell you whether he enjoyed himself."

"I did," said Halsted. "They set a pretty good table."

"And if any of you others," said Rose, "would like to sample the club, it would be easy to arrange."

Trumbull grunted, as though unconvinced of the value of the offer. "Who's talking this coming Thursday?"

"Actually," said Rose, feeling in his suitcoat pocket, "I don't remember. I have the speaker and the entertainment written down because by tomorrow morning I have to have it printed up, if we're going to send out the cards making the announcement in time."

He continued to feel in his pockets. "That's funny."

Gonzalo, who had been slumped in his chair scowling, sat up with sudden interest. "What's funny?"

"I can't find the card. That's troublesome."

"Why?" asked Gonzalo avidly.

"I won't be able to get the cards out if I don't find it." Rose stood up and began emptying his pants pockets.

The others watched until he sat down and said, with a sickly smile, "I don't seem to have it."

Halsted cleared his throat. "Does it matter, Dave?"

"Of course it matters," said Rose petulantly. "Do you think I really like all these jokes about my being absent-minded? I don't, you know. Everyone thinks it's funny and I have to go along, but it's not. It's not."

"Actually," said Avalon, "although it may not be funny to those who suffer from the condition, it is associated with intelligence. Some of the brightest people in history were terribly absent-minded. They tell the story of the great mathematician, Norbert Wiener, who was walking along Memorial Drive in Cambridge and stopped to speak to a colleague. When they were done, Wiener said, 'Tell me,

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when we stopped to speak was I walking away from Mass Avenue or toward it?' His colleague said, 'Away from it.' 'Ah,' said Wiener with satisfaction, 'then I've had my lunch.' I met Wiener once and, I tell you, I believe that story."

Drake put in, "They also tell funny stories about Newton and Einstein and Archimedes, all stressing the absent-mindedness factor."

Rose didn't seem consoled by any of this. He said, "Since I don't have the transcendent genius that should go along with absent-mindedness, what good are such stories to me?"

Rubin said, "It's not transcendent geniuses only who are involved. Every one of us becomes increasingly absent-minded with age. We all speak rapidly and articulately, but every once in a while we get hung up over a word we can't quite call to mind. It's 'at the tip of the tongue,' the saying goes. Well, that happens more and more often as one grows older."

"And how does that help me in my present situation?" demanded Rose.

Trumbull said, "What if you don't send out a card this week? I suppose the membership will know enough to show up Thursday at noon even without it."

"You don't understand, sir. In the first place, the membership wants to know who the speaker is and what he will speak about because on that depends the nature and number of guests they will invite. Without the knowledge, they won't risk it and will arrive without guests. Secondly, the speaker himself wants to be mentioned, and our president is always careful to say something like, 'Well, you certainly drew a good crowd.' Since we don't pay him, it's all the speaker gets. And thirdly, we went through a siege a couple of years ago in which the entertainment and the speakers were often decided on too late and attendance declined and the club nearly died. Since we got in our new man in charge of speakers, that has stopped and the club is flourishing. But any reminder of the bad old days will be much resented, and the blame will be placed squarely on me."

Gonzalo said, "Phone the man in charge of speakers. It might be embarrassing to have to admit you haven't got the information, but he'll give it to you again, won't he?"

"I'm sure he would, but he's away on some business trip and won't be back until next Friday. And I have no way of knowing where to reach him."

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"May I make a suggestion?" said Drake. "Why don't we all close our yaps and just sit here quietly? Let's give Mr. Rose a chance. Things are never really forgotten, there's just a problem in recall. If he sits here quietly and relaxes and doesn't try too hard to remember, it may simply come to him. It's there in his mind somewhere."

There was instant silence that persisted for minute after minute while Rose looked back and forth from person to person.

Then he shook his head. "Gentlemen, I'm overwhelmed at your thoughtfulness and sympathy, but it won't do any good. I know there are people who forget and then remember, but I'm not one of them. Believe me, I am not. In my mind, there's a bottomless pit, a black hole. Things that fall in never come out."

Trumbull said, "It must make life very difficult for you."

"It does, but I've learned to adjust. Every little thing that I ought to remember, I write down. My secretary understands that she must remember everything since she can't rely on me to remember anything."

"Well, then," said Gonzalo, "why don't you call her up? She probably knows who the next speaker will be."

"No, that's exactly what she doesn't know," said Rose impatiently. "I got the information late myself, because our speaker-fellow was busy with his forthcoming business trip and managed to send me the information only at the last minute. Now I have to give it to my secretary tomorrow morning so she can get the cards printed up. It means Saturday work and overtime, but that happens once in a while. The trouble is that she won't know the speaker until I tell her and at the present moment it looks as though I won't be able to tell her."

Rubin said, "Will it help if we all try to guess? We can name possible topics for a speaker. There's the Gulf Crisis, for instance. You wouldn't be having some Middle Eastern ambassador talking about Saddam Hussein, would you?"

"We had one last month. It wouldn't be that."

"How about the recent congressional elections?"

Rose shook his head. "I don't think so."

Trumbull said, "Some economist to discuss the forthcoming recession, though I think we're already in one and we're not allowed to say so because it wouldn't be patriotic."

Rose shook his head. He said, "This sounds exactly like the fairy tale about the malevolent dwarf, Rumpelstiltskin. The princess had to guess Rumpelstiltskin's name or lose her baby and she spent a

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whole year guessing name after name, without result."

"She did get the name in the end," said Rubin.

"Yes, she did, but that's only because she overheard Rumpelstiltskin repeating his own name in triumph, saying that the princess would never guess it. When I was young, I thought that a completely unsatisfactory ending, since I didn't see why the dwarf would be so foolish as to say his own name aloud, and why the princess should be so fortunate as to overhear him. In my case, however, there's no one to give away the name or subject of the speaker, and no one to overhear. My own personal Rumpelstiltskin story can only have an unhappy ending."

Gonzalo looked about suddenly and said, "Where's Henry?"

Avalon said, "You're not going to ask Henry for an answer to *this* problem, are you?"

"Why not? What harm can it do?"

"It can do a great deal of harm, Mario. There simply is no way in which Henry can pull an answer out of a hat and you'll just be embarrassing him. Roger, as host, you can order Mario not to do any such thing. I will not have Henry pained unfairly."

There was a mumble of agreement around the table and Halsted said, "They're right, Mario. Leave Henry alone in this case. That's an order."

Rose was looking puzzled. He said, "What's all this about Henry? He's the waiter, isn't he? Why should he be asked?"

Avalon said, "Because he's brighter than any of us and can usually see farther into a millstone than we can. In this case, though, matters are hopeless and it would be futile to ask him."

"Certainly," agreed Rose.

Henry was suddenly among them, noiselessly as usual. His ordinarily impassive face was distinctly flushed. "My apologies, gentlemen," he said, "I should have been able to help you at a considerably earlier time."

"Help us?" said Rose, with a bit of asperity. "How do you mean, help us?"

"Is it not true that your next speaker will be a William McKechnie, who will discuss the greenhouse effect that now threatens the planet? And will the entertainment not consist of a night-club singer named Diana Felner?"

Rose's eyes opened wide. "I can't believe it. Of course. That's right. Those are indeed the people."

Gonzalo said, "Aha! And they didn't want me to ask you, Henry."

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Avalon said, "In heaven's name, Henry, how on earth could you come up with those names?"

"It was quite simple, Mr. Avalon. I had information the rest of you did not have. When Mr. Rose arrived, he looked down at his hand and read off the name of the restaurant and its address from a piece of pasteboard. I paid little attention to that since I wasn't aware at the time of his inability to remember crucial points.

"He then gave me his coat, his hat, his gloves, his umbrella, and the piece of pasteboard. I deposited everything in the cloakroom and, since one never throws away anything given for the purpose of checking, I placed the pasteboard in his hatband.

"It was far too late in the course of the discussion that I remembered the pasteboard, which none of the rest of you had seen, except for Mr. Rose himself, who had obviously forgotten about it. It occurred to me that since Mr. Rose, as he said, had to write down everything lest he forget, there would always be the problem of finding something on which to make his little notes.

"It struck me that any card has two sides, and if one side is used there is still the other side for further use. I slipped into the cloakroom, obtained the piece of pasteboard with the name of this restaurant on it, and on the other side was other information which I assumed was what Mr. Rose was looking for. In a way, sir, I overheard Rumpelstiltskin."

Henry handed Rose the pasteboard. With a stunned expression on his face, Rose examined each side, and the others flocked about to study it.

Avalon laughed. "As you said, Henry, the matter was very simple, but for a moment or two I really thought you had a special pipeline to all the knowledge in the world."

Henry smiled gently. "I'm afraid that my abilities are only human and quite limited after all, Mr. Avalon. What we must do now, however, is persuade Mr. Rose, somehow, to keep a firm grip on the pasteboard and not allow anything to happen to it. I hesitate to suggest pinning it to his shirt—"

"Q"

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Beyond the shelter of the cliffs which curved around the bay, the water was really rough, with big waves crashing against the rocks scattering spray and spume. This was where it all began . . .

A SMALL EXCITEMENT

by MARGARET YORKE

I'd forgotten the strong, harsh tang of seaweed, borne inshore on the wind. It smelled of iodine, and I sniffed it sharply, standing on the rocks below the big gaunt house built like a fortress on a grass patch above the beach. There were no flowers around it—nothing would survive there unless nurtured tenderly. Only some sea-thrift, in summer, grew among the stones on the path to the main door. This had been the holiday residence of a wealthy confectioner from the Midlands and was known irreverently as Candy Castle. Now it had been turned into flats. *Sea View Holiday Rentals* proclaimed a notice-board, blue script on white paint, faded by the salty air.

Things have changed since those days long ago, when the sweet-maker was in his prime and I was young. The resort had grown to encompass wind-surfing, even pedaloes, as well as sailing. Then, small boats would stud the bay beyond the house, their blue or red sails dipping to meet the water as they heeled over, steeply tacking. On regatta days, flags flew from the flagstaff beside the Sailing Club's modest headquarters on the headland. No boat here was large enough to be called a yacht. At that time, before the resort's expansion, with its caravan parks and small houses built especially for tourists, all the annual visitors whose families could afford some sort of boat sailed, and exclusion from this fraternity meant social oblivion ashore.

When not sailing, the boats were moored in several sheltered coves around the shoreline. I remember the sound of water slapping against their hulls, the clack of the wind in their stays. That was another life, I thought, as I watched some seagulls swoop down over the rocks. What were they hoping to find? Food of some sort, of

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course. And what was I seeking here, after so long? A solution? An answer?

It was October, the season over, and nearly all the boats were up, stored away for the winter in local yards or towed home on trailers to rest in suburban gardens, the envy of neighbors, until next year. Today the sea was grey, riffled with white crests, and farther out, beyond the shelter of the cliffs which curved around the bay, the water was really rough, with big waves crashing against the rocks, scattering spray and spume.

This was where Philippa and I had walked together, slipping away from groups, or from the houses where our children slept. We had clung to each other in crannies among the rocks, in boathouses, even in her bed when her unsuspecting husband was away, for though she and the children spent most of August here, Derek came only for weekends and the final fortnight.

Our affair had gone on for years, blossoming every summer and kept alive meanwhile by rare, snatched meetings in London or elsewhere. We spoke of permanence when the children were grown up—she had two and I had four. I hadn't wanted to hurt my wife, who, after all, had done nothing wrong: she was loyal and affectionate and an excellent mother. Philippa's husband had a short temper and was a workaholic, but he was generous, and was prospering in a plastics business he had started in an outbuilding and which was now housed in a large modern complex among carefully sculptured acres and did business worldwide.

The children had enjoyed their summers here. For toddlers, the sand was fine and clean, washed by the tide. There were pools in which to catch shrimps. Toy boats could be sailed at the water's edge, and young mariners were initiated early into the lore of the sea. Like their parents, their social life was active, with barbecues, and sailing picnics when several boats would set off for another bay along the coast. Small children and the food would often go by car, with any spouses who did not like the sea (there were a few, and they were teased, but they were useful and so their idiosyncrasy was tolerated).

My wife Marjorie was among them. She was always willing to look after unlimited children at home or to drive them to a spot where bigger boats would drop anchor and their crews row inshore by dinghy, and smaller ones, centerplates up, would be beached. My affair with Philippa had begun at such a picnic, when I helped her haul her little boat ashore and joked about the need to watch the

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tide lest it be swept away. A sudden glance, an unexpected touch—something very slight was all that was needed to make us first aware of the attraction that soon, with opportunity, turned into a demanding passion.

The fortress on the cliff became mine when my father died and I inherited the confectionery empire. But my heart was never in the business. I wanted to be a painter. This had caused conflict with my father, who said I could paint for pleasure but must follow the family tradition. National service brought a reprieve, but at a price. I was involved in an accident when a rifle was fired in error. My right hand was badly damaged and I never regained full muscle control, so that I could no longer paint or draw with my former skill.

Unless I had made that an excuse. I remember how awkwardly I'd clenched my pen or brush between my weak fingers. Would the injury have restricted real talent? I produced pretty seascapes of this bay and painted other places where we traveled later, after the house here was sold and Marjorie and I spent holidays abroad where it was warmer, but the pictures were never more than pleasant. Perhaps that had always been the limit of my talent.

My father was no philistine. He contributed toward the restoration of a museum in his Midland neighborhood and took an interest in an amateur orchestra in which my mother played the violin. I should have become, in due course, chairman of the board of family directors of the firm, but my sister's husband, ambitious and discerning, jockeyed for power and outmaneuvered me.

Fobbed off with the post of publicity director, I was content enough. The role suited me: I was spared major decision-making and could occupy myself in an area I understood. I enjoyed initiating advertising drives and redesigning wrappings and packages. I sought out new artists and copywriters and used excursions to meet these people as opportunities to see Philippa. She would travel anywhere if there was the promise of a meeting, making arrangements for her children, setting off in her little car.

Businessmen have to be away from home and Marjorie didn't query my absences. She and I lived contentedly enough, never arguing, discussing differences amicably and making joint decisions about the children's schooling, their later studies, the eventual purchase of a holiday cottage in France. Two of the children continued sailing, joining clubs—one at a reservoir, the other on an estuary near his university.

Philippa's children grew up, too. And then she begged me to leave

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my wife. She pressed me, and I kissed her with as much ardor as ever while requesting further patience. It is true that over the years we had dreamed of being together always—often talked of it and fantasized about where we would live—but that was always safely in the future. Now she wanted her dreams realized. She liked her large house in Surrey and her comfortable lifestyle, but she did not love Derek. She merely, as she told me, tolerated him and found consolation in her garden, in her children—one now touring Australia, the other in America on a course at Harvard—and most of all in me. She lived for our meetings.

I knew she meant it when she said she loved me. Our affair had endured for more than twelve years, and no one knew about it, or so we believed. There had been no gossip, since our circles no longer overlapped. Philippa and her husband came here still; now they owned a new white house above the bay and quite a splendid boat in which Derek annually won races. They went skiing, too, each winter, spending Christmas at a high mountain village where snow was nearly guaranteed.

Then the letters began arriving.

Lying in my arms in an impersonal hotel bedroom, Philippa told me about them. Derek had shown her one at breakfast the previous Saturday, explaining that there had been others he had destroyed.

"It can't be true," he'd said, dangling the sheet of ordinary typing paper on which had been pasted accusatory sentences composed of words cut from newspapers. The allegation was that she had been deceiving him for years.

"I denied it, of course," she told me. "But what if he decides to have me watched?"

She waited for my answer. Surely, now, I would declare it didn't matter, that we would, at last, begin to live together.

My reaction shocked her.

"He might," I said. "We'd better take care—stop meeting for a while."

She protested and wept—she would leave home and go with me anywhere I liked. "I don't care if Derek knows," she said. "Now you can tell Marjorie and we can stop pretending!"

But my elder daughter was getting married in the summer. She and Marjorie were planning an expensive wedding—a marquee on the lawn, all the trimmings. This was no time for scandal.

"Not yet," I said. "Please, Philippa, be patient."

I looked at her, her face thin now and showing lines around the

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mouth and eyes. I felt her tense, wiry body pressed against me. I loved her—yes, of course I did—but not enough, now, to interrupt the even pattern of my life, my peaceful time at home, where Marjorie saw that things ran smoothly and welcomed me into her body with easy familiarity quite regularly, though Philippa didn't know that—she assumed, and I had let her, that Marjorie was bored with that side of life.

Of course Philippa made love with Derek, too: it was a fact of life and something separate from our infrequent secret meetings which made me feel quite youthful. I could give them up, however. The truth was that while I loved both women, one of them was expendable.

"Let's rest it for a while," I said. "If we don't meet, the letter-writer will give up. Who do you think it is?"

"*I* don't know. Perhaps someone recognized us somewhere."

"Or saw you on the train once and followed you from curiosity. Maybe someone spotted your car that time we went to Oxford when I had that meeting," I said.

It could have happened anywhere. The surprising thing was that we hadn't been found out before.

Reluctantly, she consented to an interval with no meetings, at least until after the wedding. She even promised not to ring the office. She did that sometimes, using a code we both understood, pretending she was speaking from a graphics firm that worked for me.

"It might be someone in your office," she suggested.

"Wouldn't they write to Marjorie, not Derek?" I said. "How would they trace you?"

It was logical.

But in spite of our separation, Derek received two more letters, both postmarked London, Philippa told me on the telephone, breaking our agreement. And finally, tired of the pretense, and angry, she told Derek that the allegations were true, though she protected my identity.

Derek left her. There had been a dreadful row. Appalling things were said. Articles were thrown and china broken.

"I'm not sorry," Philippa declared. "I'm glad it's in the open."

I told her Derek would cool down and return, but she didn't want this reassurance. "He won't," she said. "He's too proud, and anyway I don't want him back."

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Soon Derek told her he had found someone else he wished to marry and he wanted a divorce. "You don't expect me to be celibate, do you?" he'd demanded in a hostile exchange on the terrace of their Surrey house, the swimming pool translucent-blue beyond them.

She was young, his woman: someone he had met through work. I suspected that it was not a new romance. Derek obtained his divorce on the grounds of Philippa's admitted adultery with an unnamed individual, and he married her. He was compelled to make provision for Philippa, but it was the minimum the law decreed and her settlement included the seaside house, which she thought she would be forced to sell.

"Letting it could bring you in a useful income," Derek had remarked beneficently.

Meanwhile, living in a rented flat in Pimlico, Philippa worked in the gift department of a big department store while awaiting my summons, but the time passed and it never came. I refused her telephone calls and didn't answer the letters which, in desperation, she wrote to me at home, not caring if Marjorie should open and read them.

They met eventually. At last Philippa visited the house and I found her there with Marjorie. They were drinking tea, or Marjorie was. She looked calm, while Philippa had been crying.

"You remember Philippa, don't you, Hugh?" said Marjorie. "She's had an interesting story to tell me. Would you like some tea?"

My stomach did a somersault.

"Of course I know Philippa," I said.

"She tells me that you and she are lovers," Marjorie remarked. She began pouring tea into a spare cup for me.

"It isn't true," I said. "Her husband left her, I believe. Perhaps it's made her fanciful."

"Do I hear a cock crowing?" Marjorie inquired, head on one side.

"There are no cocks near here," I said, not understanding.

"I know you wrote the letters, Marjorie," said Philippa, jumping to her feet and glaring down at Marjorie, who sat, plump and placid, very middle-aged, her waved hair flecked with grey. "You found out and wanted to break us up. You thought if Derek knew, it would spoil things—and it did." Her voice trailed off into more tears. She was no match for the confident older woman she had enjoyed deceiving all this time.

"What letters?" asked Marjorie.

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"Don't insult me," stormed Philippa. "You knew Hugh was weak, of course. He wouldn't risk the scandal. I've found that out too late. A whole lifetime too late."

She looked across at me and, as we exchanged glances, Marjorie saw that once there had been love between us. Misery, dismay, and fear showed now, and I was the first to drop my gaze.

"You're contemptible," Philippa found the courage to tell me, and she hurried from the room.

"Go after her," Marjorie urged me.

"It's best to let her go," I said. "It's over. She'll calm down."

"Don't you owe her something, after all these years?"

"What can I say to her? There's nothing left," I said, but I went to the door and was in time to see Philippa start her small car and race off in a flurry of gravel.

She reached the gate safely, but in the road outside the big Edwardian house she took the first corner too fast to avoid an oncoming bus. Or that was what the police thought had happened. The bus driver said she drove straight at him.

She was in hospital for months, her face badly cut and permanently scarred despite many operations. Both her legs were broken, and an arm, and several ribs, and she had a fractured skull. When she recovered, to the degree she ever did, she lived in the seaside house, almost a recluse, disfigured and with one leg shorter than the other, lame forever and a mental cripple—until eventually she had to go into a nursing home.

I made her an allowance. Marjorie insisted. It was all my fault, she said, and my punishment was to remember that every subsequent day of my life. "I knew about it, Hugh," she told me. "I'd known all the time. But I didn't write the letters. I made myself content with what I had in life, which was a great deal. I enjoyed your companionship and most of your loyalty. She was your small excitement, and in a way I understood. I remember Derek. He was a selfish, insensitive man. You are gentle. She deserved some joy."

Philippa died today. I used to visit her each fortnight, though toward the end she didn't know who I was. She was, in the end, relieved of pain and mental anguish by drugs, and I couldn't bear to see her reduced to such a pitiful piece of wreckage. I snuffed out her life easily enough, with a pillow over her face. She didn't struggle, and I left her, tidiness restored, apparently asleep. The nurses

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will discover what I did, though—they thought she would live for years. I came here to try to make sense of it all, face my guilt, decide what must be done, and I've concluded that this isn't the place for my resolution.

I shall drive inland and stop at a well known local beauty spot overlooking a spectacular ravine, where a waterfall gushes over rocks forty feet below a viewing point. There's been a lot of rain here in recent weeks and there will be plenty of water pouring down the mountain. To aid my apparently accidental fall, I may have to break the wooden safety barrier. This may get some official into trouble for neglect, but I don't wish my family to endure the opprobrium of my suicide. As I shall leave no letter, an open verdict may be recorded. A man my age might have a touch of vertigo, even a heart attack, which, if my body is pounded by the rocks, as it will be, may not be detectable. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth: a life for a life. I destroyed Philippa long before her death.

I have left a clue for Marjorie. Among my papers she will find an envelope containing words cut out from newspapers, trial efforts at the letters I wrote and sent anonymously when I wanted to extricate myself from my entanglement and sought to do it so despicably. She will understand.

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ELLERY QUEEN CONTEST FIRST-PRIZE WINNER—1952

Watching Jaynes, Melvin thought, He lacks the evil power of Strothers' intelligence, and he lacks the strength of natural good. He doesn't know what he is, and he knows it.

The well deserving eighth winner in the thirteen years of mystery-story contests sponsored by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . .

MY BROTHER DOWN THERE

by STEVE FRAZEE

Now there were three left. Here was the fourth, doubled up on his side at the edge of the meadow grass where the wind had scattered pine needles. His face was pinched and grey. Big black wood ants were backing away from the blood settling into the warm soil.

Jaynes turned the dead man over with his foot. "Which one is this?"

Holesworth, deputy warden of the State Penitentiary, gave Jaynes an odd look.

"Joseph Otto Weyerhauser," he said. "Lifer for murder."

Deputy Sheriff Bill Melvin was standing apart from the rest of the posse. He had been too deep in the timber to take part in the shooting. He watched the little green State Patrol plane circling overhead. It was a windless day. The voice of the mountains spoke of peace and summer.

Joseph Otto Weyerhauser. Spoken that way, the words gave dignity to the fugitive who lay now on the earth in the pale-green uniform that had been stolen from the wash lines of a little filling station a hundred miles away.

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Sid Jaynes was a beefy man with dark eyes that glittered. Jaynes had not known who the convict was and he had not cared. The green pants and shirt, when Weyerhauser tried to run across the head of the little meadow, had been enough for him.

"He played it like a fool," Jaynes said. "He could have stayed in the timber."

"You made twelve dollars and fifty cents with each one of those shots, Jaynes." The deputy warden's voice ran slowly and deliberately.

"Let the state keep their twenty-five bucks," Jaynes said. "I didn't come along for that." His rifle was a beautiful instrument with a telescopic sight. The dead man lay beside a sawed-off shotgun and a .38 pistol taken from a guard he had slugged with a bar of soap in a sock. "Why didn't he stay in the timber, the damn fool?"

"They're all city boys," Holesworth said. "He was heading for the highway."

It put you on the wrong side of your job to make a comparison between the dead man's short-range weapons and the rifles of the posse, Deputy Bill Melvin thought. Weyerhauser had been one of four prison escapees. He had taken his big chance with the others, and here it had ended.

That was all there was to it, but Melvin wished he didn't have to look at Weyerhauser or hear any more from Jaynes, who was always the first man to reach the sheriff's office when the word went out that a manhunt was on. Jaynes, who ran a garage, never came when help was needed to find a lost hunter or a wrecked plane.

Sheriff Rudd spoke. Sheriff Rudd was a veteran of the open-range days of men and cattle. He stood like a rifle barrel, tall and spare. His face was bony, with a jutting nose. "There's three more," he said. "All tougher than Weyerhauser." He squinted at the green plane now circling lower in the trough of the mountains. "Call that flyer, Melvin. He's buzzing around this basin like a bee in a washtub. Tell him to get up in the air. Tell him about this and have him call the patrol station over the hill and see if anything has popped there."

Deputy Melvin started back to the horse with the radio gear. Jaynes called, "Ask him if he's spotted any of the other three!"

Melvin paid no attention.

"One twenty, ground party, Stony Park."

"Ground party, go ahead."

"Get some altitude. You're making Sheriff Rudd nervous."

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"What does Rudd think I am? There's a hell of a wind up here. What happened down there?"

"We got Weyerhauser. Dead. Call Scott and Studebaker on the roadblocks."

"Stand by," the pilot said.

Melvin leaned against the mare. She moved a little, cropping grass, switching her tail at deer flies unconcernedly while Melvin listened to the plane call across the mountains. Jaynes' sleeping bag was on the crosspieces of the pack saddle, put there to protect the radio from branches.

Jaynes walked over. "Has he spotted—?"

"I didn't ask," said Melvin.

"Why not?"

"He would have said so if he had."

"Well, it won't hurt to ask. Maybe—"

"Go collect your twenty-five bucks, Jaynes."

"What do you mean by that?"

Jaynes didn't understand. He never would.

"Ground party, One twenty," the pilot said. "Negative on all roadblocks and patrol cars."

"Thanks, One twenty. Call Studebaker again and have an ambulance meet us at the big spring, east side of Herald Pass, at one this afternoon."

"Okay." The plane began to climb. Melvin watched until it gained altitude and shot away across the timbered hump of Herald Pass.

"That's a hell of a note," Jaynes complained. "Guys like me come out here, taking time off from our business just to do what's right, and you don't even ask whether he's spotted the others or not."

Melvin pulled the canvas cover back over the radio. "Four times twenty-five makes a hundred, Jaynes. What are you going to buy with all that money?"

"I give it to the Red Cross, don't I!"

"You mean that first twenty-five you knocked down—that little forger? I remember him, Jaynes. He came out of a railroad culvert getting his hands up, scared to death, and you cut loose."

Jaynes was puzzled, not angry. He said, "You talk funny for a deputy sheriff, Melvin. You sound like you thought there was something nice about these stinking cons. What are we supposed to do with them?"

Melvin went back to the posse. Deputy Warden Holesworth had searched the dead man. On the ground was a pile. Candy bars,

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smeary and flattish from being carried in pockets, and seven packs of cigarettes.

"One down and three to go," Jaynes said. "Where do we head now, Sheriff?"

Sheriff Rudd looked around the group. Two or three of the men sitting in the grass had already lost stomach. Rudd named them and said, "Take that sorrel that's started to limp and pack Weyerhauser up to the highway."

"At the big spring on the east side," Melvin said. "There'll be an ambulance there at one."

"I've got to get back myself," the deputy warden said. "Tomorrow I'll send a couple of guards out. We can fly in Blayden's hounds from up north—"

"I don't favor hounds," the sheriff said. "Keep your guards, too, Holesworth. The last time you sent guards we had to carry 'em out. You keep 'em sitting in those towers too much."

"That's what they get paid for, not for being Indian guides and cross-country men. To hell with you." They grinned at each other. Then Holesworth gave Jaynes another speculative glance and helped lift Weyerhauser onto the lame horse.

That left seven in the posse. They divided the cigarettes. Small ants went flying when someone gave the pile of candy bars a kick. One chocolate bar, undisturbed by the boot, was melting into the earth beside the other stain.

Two days later Sheriff Rudd cut the trail of three men whose heelprints showed P marks in the center. Rudd swung down and studied the tracks, and then he took the saddle off his gelding.

"What's the stall?" Jaynes asked. "That's the track of our meat, Rudd."

"A day and a half old, at least. Give your horse a rest." The sheriff sat down on a log and began to fill his pipe.

Melvin walked beside the footprints for several steps. He saw the wrapper of a candy bar lying on the ground. Four days on candy and desperation. The poor devils. Poor devils, hell—the candy had been stolen from the filling station where they had slugged a sixty-year-old man. The desperation was their own, and they were asking for the same as Weyerhauser.

Melvin looked up at the grey caps of the mountains. They ran here in a semicircle, with only one trail over them, and that almost unknown. If these tracks with the deep-cut marks in the heels con-

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tinued up, the fugitives would be forced to the forgotten road that led to Clover Basin. From there the trail went over the spine at 13,000 feet.

It was a terrible climb for men living on candy bars. Melvin went back to the resting posse, saying nothing.

"Clover Basin, maybe?" Sheriff Rudd asked.

Melvin nodded.

"Why haven't the damn search planes seen them?" Jaynes asked.

"There's trees and rocks, and the sound of a plane engine carries a long way ahead." Bud Pryor was a part-time deputy, here now because he had been called to go. He was a barrel-chested man who could stop a barroom fight by cracking heads together, but he didn't care much for riding the mountains. And he didn't care at all for Jaynes.

"Any other stupid questions, sharpshooter?" Bud Pryor asked Jaynes.

The sheriff got up. "Let's go."

They rode into the first of the great fields of golden galliardia at the lower end of Clover Basin. The buildings of the Uncle Sam Mine hung over the slope at the upper end like grey ghosts. Rudd stopped his horse. The others crowded up behind him.

Motion started at the highest building and sent small points out on the slide-rock trail. "Hey!" Jaynes cried. Both he and Melvin put glasses on the tiny figures scrambling over the flat grey stones. Two men in green uniforms. Two men who ran and fell and crawled upward toward the harsh rise of Clover Mountain.

Jaynes let his binoculars fall on the cord around his neck. He raised his rifle, sighting through the scope. Some sort of dedication lay in his glittering eyes, some drive that made Melvin look away from him and glance at the sheriff.

Rudd, however, without the aid of glasses, was watching the fleeing men on the eternal stones of Clover Mountain.

Jaynes kicked his horse ahead. "Come on!"

"Get off and lead that horse a while, Jaynes," the sheriff said. "You've knocked the guts out of him already the last few days."

"There they are!" Jaynes gestured with his rifle.

"And there they go." Rudd got down and began to lead his horse.

"Now what the hell!" Jaynes twisted his face. "They're getting away—farther out of range every second!"

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"They're a mile airline—it'll take us the best part of two hours to reach the mine," Sheriff Rudd said with weary patience. "And then it will be dark. Go on, Jaynes, if you want to, but leave that horse behind."

"It's mine."

"You'll leave it behind, I said."

Jaynes looked through his scope and cursed.

"Three came in here," Bud Pryor said. "Go on up and kick that third one out, Jaynes. He's there."

"How do you know?" Jaynes' voice was not large.

Pryor's thick lips spread in a grin. He was still sweating from the last steep hill where they had led the horses. "Gets chilly mighty quick in these high places, don't it?"

Rudd started on, leading his horse.

It was dusk when they closed in on the bunkhouse of the Uncle Sam Mine, working around from the rocks and coming closer in short rushes to the toe of the dump. Jaynes and Melvin went up the dump together until their heads were nearly level with the rusted rails that still held rotting chocks.

"I'll cover you from here," Jaynes said. "This scope gathers light so a man can't miss."

Melvin raised his head above the dump. An evening wind drove grouse feathers across the yellow waste toward him. He saw a rat scurry along the ledge of a broken window and then sit still, looking out. Inside, two or three others squealed as they raced across the floor. Melvin scrabbled on up and walked into the bunkhouse. Two rats carrying grouse bones ducked through holes in the floor. One half of the roof was caved in but the other end, where the stove sat with its pipe reduced to lacy fragility, was still a shelter.

The stove was warm.

Here, for a time, three men had stayed. They were city-bred, and so this manmade shell seemed the natural place to take shelter. No outdoorsman would have sought the rat-fouled place, but the escaped prisoners must have received some small comfort from it.

Instinctively they had huddled inside this pitiful ruin for the security that all pursued mankind must seek. And now, caught by the dusk and the silence, looking through a window at the mighty sweep of the high world, Bill Melvin was stirred by a feeling for the fugitives that sprang from depths far below the surface things called logic and understanding.

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"What's in there?" Jaynes called.

Melvin stepped outside. "Nothing."

Jaynes cursed. He climbed to the dump level and stared at the dim slide-rock trail. He fondled his rifle.

Pryor's voice came from the lower buildings, high-pitched and clear, running out to the walls of the great basin and echoing back with ghostly mockery. "Nothing in any of these, Sheriff!"

"Let's get on the trail!" Jaynes yelled.

"Come down here!" Sheriff Rudd called, and both their voices ran together on the darkening rocks.

Melvin and Jaynes rejoined the others. Melvin was dead-weary now, but Jaynes kept looking at the slide-rock, fretting.

"We can't get horses over that slide-rock at night," Rudd said. "And maybe not in daylight. We'll camp here tonight."

"And all that time they'll be moving," Jaynes objected. "Are you sure you want to catch them, Sheriff?"

"They'll be feeling their way down the worst switchbacks in these hills," Rudd said. "On empty stomachs."

"Like hell!" Jaynes said. "They've been living like kings on grouse."

"One grouse," Melvin said.

"They must be getting fat." Rudd pointed to the floor of the basin. "We'll camp down there and give the horses a chance to graze."

"And make this climb again in the morning," Jaynes said disgustedly.

Dew was gathering on the grass when they picketed the horses. All the chill of the high-country night seemed to have gathered in the enormous black hole. They ate almost the last of their food at a fire built from scrubby trees.

Jaynes cleaned his rifle before he ate. He rubbed the stock and admired the weapon, standing with the firelight glittering in his eyes.

"What will that pretty thing do that a good Krag won't?" Bud Pryor asked.

Jaynes smiled and let the answer gleam in the reflection of the flames.

"Somebody will have to start out tomorrow for grub," the sheriff said. "How about it, Jaynes?"

"I can live on the country," Jaynes said.

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"Yeah." The sheriff unrolled his sleeping bag. "One hour each on guard tonight. Not at the fire, either. Stay out by the horses. I'll take it from three till dawn."

Jaynes peered into the darkness. "You think the third one is around in the rocks, huh?"

"I think the horses can get all tangled up. The third man went over the hill a long time ago," Rudd said.

"How do you know that?" Jaynes asked.

"Because I'm betting it was Marty Kaygo. He's the toughest and the smartest. He wouldn't sit in that eagle's nest up there hoping nothing comes after him."

"Kaygo, huh? What was he in for?" Jaynes stared toward the gloomy crest of the mountain.

"He killed two cops." Rudd took off his boots, pulled his hat down tightly, and got into his sleeping bag. "He killed them with one shot each." He was asleep a few moments later.

Jaynes set his rifle on his sleeping bag and began to eat. "Who are the other two?"

"Don't even know their names?" Melvin asked.

"What's the difference if I don't?"

Maybe Jaynes was right. It had to be done, one way or another—names merely made it harder. "Sam Castagna and Ora L. Strothers," Melvin said. "Castagna used to blow up rival gamblers for a syndicate. Strothers specialized in holding up banks."

"Ora L. That's nice and gentle, a con having a name like that," Jaynes said.

"Don't you give him the right to have a name?" Melvin asked. "Don't you give him the right to be a human being?"

Jaynes looked blank at the anger in Melvin's voice. "What is it with you, anyway? You and Rudd both talk like it was a crime to send those bastards rolling in the grass."

Rolling in the grass. That was exactly what had happened to Weyerhauser when Jaynes' second shot ripped through his belly. Melvin walked away from the fire suddenly, into the cold dark layers of the night.

The possemen were sacking out. Jaynes squatted near the fire alone, eating, a puzzled expression on his face. Bud Pryor, stripped down to long underwear and his boots, came over and stood beside the flames for a few minutes, warming his hands.

Dislike of Jaynes and a sort of wonder mingled on Pryor's fleshy face. He parted his thick lips as if to speak. But then he left the fire and settled into his sleeping bag, grunting.

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The night was large and silent. Up toward the knife edge of Clover Mountain, two men had scrambled across the rocks, clawing where slides had filled the trail. Two men running for their lives.

Melvin kept seeing it over and over.

Castagna's sentence had been commuted to life just two days short of the gas chamber. Strothers had never killed a man, but he was cold and ruthless. Marty Kaygo, who must have gone across the hill before the others, was in debt to the law 180 years. This was his third escape from prison.

They were all no good, predators against society. But in the solemn night, with the tremendous peace of the mountains upon him, Bill Melvin stared uneasily at the line which must run from crime to punishment. Ordinarily he didn't allow himself to be disturbed like this, but Jaynes, scraping the last of his supper from a tin plate, had kicked over the little wall that divided what men must do from what they think.

"I'll take the first watch," Melvin said.

Jaynes came out from the fire. He spoke in a low voice. "It's only nine o'clock. Barker's got a flashlight. We could slip up on the slide-rock trail—there are patches of snow there—and see for sure if they all three crossed."

"Why?"

"If one is still here, he'll try to slip out of the basin tonight. We could lay out in that narrow place and nail him dead to rights."

"I'll take the first watch." Melvin walked deeper into the night, trembling from high-altitude fatigue, mouthing the sickening aftertaste of Jaynes' presence.

"Why not, Melvin?"

"Go to bed!" Melvin snapped.

Sometimes a healthy man doesn't sleep well at great altitudes, and so it was with Melvin this night. When Jaynes relieved him, Melvin heard the beefy hunter going down the basin past the horses. He knew that Jaynes would make for a place where he could command the narrow entrance to the basin, and that he would lie there patiently, his rifle ready.

Melvin wondered if his eyes would glitter in the dark.

Jaynes stayed his watch, and the watch of the man he did not waken for relief.

Dawn slid across the peaks. Light was there when dew and gloom were still heavy in the basin. The sheriff and Pryor cooked the last

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of the bacon and opened the last two cans of beans.

Jaynes saddled up and led his horse toward the fire before he ate. "What kind of rifle was it this—what was his name? Kaygo?—stole at the filling station?"

"A .30-06," Rudd said. There were pouches under his eyes this morning and he looked his years. He stared through the smoke at Jaynes. "New one. He took five boxes of shells, too, Jaynes. They're hunting cartridges."

"I've got a few expanding noses myself," Jaynes said. "Let's get started."

Rudd spat to one side. "You're like a hog going to war."

Bud Pryor laughed. The other manhunters stared at Jaynes or at the ground. They seemed ashamed now, Melvin thought, to be a part of this thing. Or a part of Jaynes.

Pryor said explosively, "I'll go in after chow today, Sheriff. Me and Jaynes."

"No!" Jaynes said. "I can live on the country. Me and Melvin can keep going when the rest of you have to run for a restaurant."

Rudd said to Pryor, "You and Baker, then. It's closer now to Scott than it is to Studebaker, so we'll split up after we cross the hill. Try the radio again, Melvin. Maybe nobody will have to go in."

"No contact," Melvin said later. "When we get to the top, we can reach out and make it."

They took the slide-rock trail from the dump at the side of the bunkhouse. In passing, Melvin noticed that the grouse feathers were almost entirely blown away.

Seventy years before, jack trains had used the trail but now the years had slid into it. The posse led their horses. Sparks from steel shoes in the stretches where the ledge still showed drill marks. A clattering and a scramble, with the horses rolling their eyes when they had to cross the spills of dry-slippery rocks.

In the snowbanks, the tracks of three men—and one man had gone about a day before the others.

There lay the ridge, half a mile ahead. On the left, where they traveled, the mountain ran down wildly to ledges where no human being would ever set foot.

They lost the little radio mare. She slipped and fell and then she was threshing over and the slide-rock ran with her. She struck a ledge and was gone. The rocks kept spilling down a thousand feet below.

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Rudd patted the neck of his frightened gelding. "There went a damn good little mare."

Jaynes said, "They don't exactly give those radios away, either. My sleeping bag cost sixty-two bucks."

They came out on the wedge-top and went down three switchbacks to let the horses take a blow out of the wind. A dozen lakes were winking in the sunlight. The mountains on this side ran in a crazy pattern. Every major range in the United States runs north and south, with one exception; but from the pinpoints where a man must stand, the north-south coursing is often lost or doesn't exist at all.

There was no highway in sight, no smoke, just the vast expanse of timber with the grey-sharp slopes above and the shine of beaver meadows where little streams lay separated from each other by ridges eight thousand feet high.

"A regiment could hide out down there all summer," Rudd said. "But these guys will most likely keep running downhill, hoping to hit a highway sooner or later."

Jaynes' rifle was in his hands, as usual when he was on foot. He pointed with it. "I know every inch of that country. I've fished and hunted all through it."

"Don't be a fool," Sheriff Rudd said. "I rode that country before you were born, and I discovered a new place every time I went out. And I could do the same for a hundred years."

Jaynes said, "I can find any tenderfoot that tries to hide out down there." He patted the stock of his rifle.

"Goddamn you, Jaynes! I'm sick of you!" Melvin cried. "Keep your mouth shut!"

Jaynes was surprised. "Now what did I say? Have you got a biting ulcer or something, Melvin?"

"Let's go on down," Rudd said.

Melvin's stomach held a knot that eased slowly. For a moment he had seen the land without a man in it, forgetting even himself as he stood there on the mountain. But Jaynes would never let a man forget himself for long.

In the middle of the morning, the green plane came over and circled them. The pilot was calling, Melvin knew, but they had no way now to listen or call back. After a while the plane soared away over the green timber and drifted on toward Scott.

They struck the timber. Fallen trees lay across the trail, slowing the horses. There were still three men ahead.

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"Planes, radios, horses—what the hell good are they?" Jaynes said irritably. "In the end, it comes down to men on foot closing in on each other."

"Like you closed in on the Uncle Sam bunkhouse, huh?" Pryor asked. "Hand to hand, tooth and toenail."

"Strip down to a breechclout, Jaynes," Rudd said. "I'll give you my knife and you go after Kaygo properly."

Barker said, "Yeah, why don't you do that, Jaynes? You big-mouthed bastard, you."

Barker had little imagination. He was a sullen man who would kill the fugitives as quickly as Jaynes. All that motivated Barker now, Melvin thought, was a desire to transfer the cause of his hunger and weariness to another human being. Jaynes had already been marked by him as a target.

"I don't understand you guys, so help me," Jaynes said.

Melvin felt a flash of pity for him. The man really didn't understand. What made Jaynes tick probably was as obscure as the forces that had sent the men he so greatly wanted to kill into a life of crime. Somebody ought to be able to figure it out.

The big buck flashed across the narrow lane in a split second. The smaller one that followed an instant later was going just as fast. Jaynes broke its neck with one shot.

The thought of fresh liver relieved some of Melvin's dislike of Jaynes. "Nice shooting, Jaynes."

"Thanks."

"I'll eat that thing without skinning it," Bud Pryor said. He had his knife out already and was trotting ahead.

Jaynes sat on a log and cleaned his rifle while Pryor and Melvin dressed the buck. Jaynes had merely glanced at it and turned away.

"He's larded up like first-class, grass-fed beef," Pryor said. "Lucky shot, Jaynes."

"I seldom miss a running target." Jaynes spoke absently, looking ahead at the trees.

Pryor sent Melvin a helpless look. "It sure looked lucky to me."

"No luck at all," said Jaynes. "It's simple if you have the eye for it."

Pryor made a motion with his knife as if to cut his own throat. He and Melvin laughed. For a few moments Jaynes was no problem to them.

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"Sling it on a horse," Sheriff Rudd said. "We can eat when we get to Struthers' sawmill set."

"Struthers? That's one of the men we want," Jaynes said.

"Different spelling," Rudd said. "Jumbo Struthers has been dead for forty years, and the sawmill hasn't run for fifty-two years."

"We could dig him up," Pryor said, grinning, "so Jaynes could shoot him."

For the first time, Jaynes showed anger. "Why do you keep needling me? What are we out here for, anyway? You act like there was something wrong in what we're doing!"

"We're here to bring back three men, dead *or* alive," Rudd said. "Let's go."

The trail expanded into a logging road, with live trees trying to close it out and dead trees trying to block it. Mosquitoes came singing in from a marsh on the left. Already tormented by the snags on fallen timber, the horses shook their heads as the insects buzzed their ears. Pryor kept swinging his hat at blowflies settling on the carcass of the deer. "The good old summertime," he said. "How'd you get me out here, Sheriff?"

"You were getting fat, so you volunteered."

The small talk irritated Jaynes. "We're not making much time," he said.

Later, after a delay to lever aside a tangle of dead jack-pines, he went ahead in a stooping posture for several steps. "One of the boys ain't doing so good all at once."

Melvin studied the tracks. One man had started to drag his leg and a second one was helping him. The third track was still older than these two. Farther down the road a punch mark appeared in the soil. One man was using a short pole as a cane.

Jaynes wanted to race away on the trail. "We'll have that one before long!"

"Hold up." The sheriff stopped to fill his pipe. "I'd say the fellow twisted a muscle or sprained his ankle trying to jump that tangle we just cleared out. The other one will leave him, that's sure."

"The old ranger lean-to in Boston Park must be pretty close," Jaynes said. "Half a mile, I'd say."

"About a mile," Rudd said.

Melvin knew about it, the big lean-to sometimes used by fishermen and hunters. Man had made it, and the fact would seem important to the men ahead. Considering the tracks of the injured fugitive, Melvin wondered if the convict would last to Boston Park.

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"If he's bunged up as bad as it looks, he's likely ready to quit," Rudd said.

"He won't give up," Jaynes said. "He'll make a stand."

The sheriff narrowed his eyes at Jaynes. "Why will he, if he's hurt?"

"If he's been left at that lean-to, he's the loneliest man in the world right now," Melvin put in.

"Yeah?" Jaynes kept edging ahead. "I'm not walking up on that hut to find out how lonely he is."

"Nobody is," Rudd said. "When we get close, two men will take the horses. The rest of us will cut off into the timber and come in from all sides of the lean-to. He may not be there at all."

The lean-to was set between two trees on high ground, clear of the swamp that edged the beaver ponds. Generations of outdoorsmen had piled boughs along the sides and on top until the shelter was a rust-brown mass. That it hadn't been burned by a careless match long ago spoke tersely of the nature of the men who came far into the mountains.

Melvin and Sheriff Rudd came to the edge of the trees a hundred yards apart. They waited for Pryor, on the right. Barker and Jaynes were to ease out of the trees on the left, Barker to cover the back of the shelter, Jaynes to prevent escape farther to the left.

There had been a fire recently among the blackened stones before the lean-to. Fine ashes stirred there, lifting to a little wind that rolled across the beaver ponds and whispered through the grass.

Melvin saw Pryor come to the edge of the trees and signal with his hand. Barker slipped to the cover of a windfall behind the shelter. He wagged his rifle.

Inside the lean-to a man cleared his throat.

Melvin sank to one knee behind a log.

The sheriff said, "Come out of there! You're boxed! Walk out with your hands up!"

"I can't walk," a voice replied.

"Come out of there. We'll rip the place apart with bullets if I have to ask again."

The brittle needles scraped against each other. A chunky man whose face was black with beard came on hands and knees from the hut. He was wearing a soiled, torn green uniform too small for him. One pants leg was gone below the knee.

"Toss your pistol away," Rudd ordered.

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"No gun." The man clawed against one of the trees. He pulled himself erect. "No gun, you stinking, dirty—" He started to fall and made a quick grab at the crosspiece of the shelter.

A rifle blasted from the edge of the timber beyond Barker. The man at the lean-to fell. He was dead, Melvin was sure. "Watch him! Watch him!" Jaynes called. "It's just his arm!"

Melvin and the sheriff walked in then. The man had been shot through the left hand, a thick hand, by a soft-nosed hunting bullet. The palm was torn away and the fingers were spread like the spokes of a shattered wheel. The man rolled on his side and put his broken hand under his arm.

"My leg was cracked before." He cursed. "Now look at it!" The leg was really broken now—it had twisted under when the man fell.

Melvin searched him and found two packs of cigarettes. Barker came around the hut and Jaynes arrived on the run. "I could just see his arm when he grabbed for his gun!" he cried.

"He grabbed, all right," Rudd said. "To keep from falling on a busted leg."

"Oh!" Jaynes stared down. "It looked to me like—"

"Shut up!" Rudd said, then yelled at the timber where the two men were holding the horses. "Bring 'em on!" There was a first-aid kit on Melvin's horse.

"Which one is this?" Jaynes asked.

"Sam Castagna." Suspected of seven murders, convicted of one, sentence commuted to life. "Where's Strothers, Sam?"

"Run out on me." With his face against the brown needles Castagna tried to spit explosively. It merely dribbled from his mouth and hung in his black beard. He cursed in Italian, glaring up at Jaynes.

Barker said, "No gun anywhere around the hut. They had two sawed-offs and two .38 pistols besides the rifle Kaygo swiped at the filling station."

The horses came in at a trot. Pryor circled the swamp and plodded through the grass. He looked at the wounded man. "Castagna, huh? Nice boy who likes to put bombs on car starters. The other two are still going down the trail, Sheriff."

"Straight to a highway," Rudd said. "Let's patch him up and move on."

"I'm going to eat here," Pryor said, "if you have to leave me. I'm going to beat the blowflies to some of that deer." He began to build a fire . . .

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Melvin and Barker made splints for Castagna's broken leg. They wrapped his hand. He watched them stolidly. When they pulled his leg, he ground his teeth and sweated. Melvin got him a drink of water afterward.

"Thanks." Castagna held the cup in a trembling hand, slopping part of the water down his chin and into the thick black hairs at the base of his neck.

"Where are Strothers and Kaygo, Castagna?" Jaynes asked.

Castagna looked hungrily at the meat Pryor was roasting on a green limb. He lay back on the ground and closed his eyes. There was a depression under his head and it caused his face to tilt straight into the sun. Melvin took off his coat and rolled it under the wounded man's head.

They squatted around the fire, roasting cutlets chopped from the loin with a hand-ax, too hungry to bother with a frying pan. Blood from half-raw meat ran down their chins when they chewed.

None of us is far removed from the wolf, Melvin thought; but there is a difference between men like Rudd and Sam Castagna. There has to be. Yet where was the difference between Castagna and Jaynes, who cleaned his rifle before he ate?

Melvin glanced at the gleaming weapon, laid carefully aside on the dry grass. He felt an urge to hurl the rifle far out into the beaver pond.

Sheriff Rudd ground his meat moodily. "I never used to stop when I was on the chase. We stop to gorge ourselves while a desperate man keeps going. The difference is he *has* to get away and we don't *have* to catch him."

"Him? Who do you mean?" Jaynes asked. "Why don't we have to catch him?"

"Oh, hell," Rudd said. "Gimme the salt, Barker."

"I don't understand what—" Jaynes said.

"Before we leave here, Jaynes, you throw into that pond every damn hunting bullet you got," Rudd said. "I'm going to watch you do it."

They all looked at Jaynes.

He couldn't grasp the reason for their hostility. "Shells cost money. I'll use that old coffee can over there and bury them under the lean-to. Next fall I'll be through here hunting."

"Do that, then," Rudd said. "Every damn soft-nose you got." But he seemed to find no satisfaction in the trifling victory.

He knew he was only scratching at the surface, Melvin thought.

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The sheriff twisted around toward Castagna. "Some deer meat, Sam?"

"Yeah. Yeah, let me try it." Castagna ate greedily, and then he lost everything before they could get him onto a horse.

The green plane was cruising southwest of them. A few minutes later it came over Boston Park, dipping low. It went southwest again, circling six or seven times.

"Uh-huh," Rudd said.

"He must be over the Shewalter Meadows," Jaynes said. "That's all down-timber between here and there."

"Not if you know the way from the sawmill set." Rudd swung up. "Catch Castagna if he starts to fall."

There were still two sets of mantracks down the logging road. Just before they reached the sawmill site, they found a sawed-off shotgun laid across a log, pointing toward one of the sawdust piles near the creek. Under it an arrow mark scratched in the black soil pointed in the same direction.

"Now that's a cute trick," Jaynes said. He sighted through his scope at the sawdust piles, age-brown mounds blending into the wilderness. He was suspicious, but he was confused.

"It reads to me that Strothers wants to quit, and wants to be sure we know it," Rudd said.

"Suppose he's still got the pistol? Suppose it's Kaygo?" Jaynes asked.

"Most likely Kaygo is over there where the plane was circling," Melvin said. Kaygo had left the others at the Uncle Sam Mine. The sheriff, at least, was sure of that, and Melvin had accepted it. Still, he didn't like the quiet of the sawdust piles, warm and innocent-looking out there by the creek.

Rudd said, "Come on, Melvin. The rest of you stay here. Take Castagna off the horse and let him lay down a while."

"I'd better—" Jaynes said.

"Stay right here," the sheriff said.

Rudd and Melvin leaped the creek and tramped on the spongy surface of the sawdust piles. In a little hollow of the shredded wood they found their man, asleep.

His blond whiskers were short and curly. The sun had burned his face. His green shirt, washed recently in the stream, was spread

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near him and now it was dry. His heavy prison shoes were set neatly together near his feet.

"Strothers, all right," Rudd said. "Wake up!"

The man was snoring gently. He jerked a little but he didn't rouse until Rudd tossed one of the shoes on his stomach.

Strothers opened his eyes and yawned. "What kept you so long?" he asked.

Cold and deadly, the bulletins had read—he had never killed a man, but he had always entered banks prepared to kill. He had studied law and, later, engineering. It was said that he could have been successful in either. Now he sat on a pile of sawdust in the wilderness, ready to go back to the isolation cells.

"Local yokels, eh? I didn't think those lazy bastards of guards would come this far. Got anything to smoke, Constable?"

"Where's Kaygo?" the sheriff asked.

Strothers yawned again. He felt his feet. "Talk about blisters!" He began to put on his shoes. "Why, Marty left us at a rat hole on the side of a cliff day before yesterday."

"We know that," Rudd said.

"That's why I mentioned it." Strothers reached toward his shirt.

"Hold it!" Melvin picked up the shirt. There was no weight in it, nothing under it. He tossed it to Strothers, who rose and began to put it on.

"Where's the other .38?" Rudd asked mildly.

"The other? So you got Weyerhauser. Can I have a smoke?"

Melvin lit a cigarette and tossed it to Strothers. The sheriff and his deputy glanced quickly at each other.

"I don't know who's got it," Strothers said. The horses were coming out of the timber and he saw Castagna. "Did you ask Sam?"

The sheriff's eyes were tight. He spoke easily. "Sam's clean. You look clean. So Kaygo's got it. Why'd you give up, Strothers?"

"Too much of nothing here. No future." Strothers grinned, dragging on his cigarette, watching the horses from the corners of his eyes. The surface was smooth, but there was steel savagery underneath. Castagna was a bully who had graduated to bombs on car starters and bundles of dynamite against the bedroom walls of gambling kings. Strothers was everything the long F.B.I. reports said.

"You could have given up with Castagna," Melvin said.

"That two-bit character! I play it alone." Strothers puffed his smoke. "Do I get some chow?"

"Yeah," Rudd said. "Half-done venison."

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"Raw will be fine, Constable."

"Walk on over toward the horses," Rudd said. "When I say stop—stop."

"Sure, Constable. Just don't stall. I want to get home as soon as possible. I'm doing some leather work that can't be neglected."

Not the usual bravado of a petty criminal—Strothers was too coldly intelligent for that. He was spreading it on lightly for another purpose. He wouldn't have much luck with Rudd, Melvin knew. Let him find it out himself.

Strothers limped ahead of them. "When my last blister broke, that was when I decided to hell with it."

"Right there, Strothers," Rudd said when they were twenty feet from the horses. With the exception of Jaynes, the posse was relaxed. The first heat of the chase had been worn from them and this third easy victory coming toward them was nothing to cause excitement.

Rudd nodded at Melvin, making a circle with his finger in the air. Melvin walked wide around Strothers and freed his lariat from the saddle.

"The great big Strothers, he comes easy," Castagna said sullenly.

Strothers ignored Castagna—his eyes were on the rope in Melvin's hands. Barker and the others looked at Strothers dully, but Jaynes sensed what they did not. He pushed his scope sight down and raised his rifle.

"Never mind!" Rudd said sharply, standing several paces behind Strothers. "Put that rifle down, Jaynes. Drop your pants, Strothers."

Strothers smiled. "Now look, Constable—" He was watching the loop in Melvin's hand.

And that was when Rudd stepped in and slammed Strothers to the ground with the butt of his rifle. Melvin drove in quickly then. Strothers was enough for the two of them for a while, but they got his arms tied behind him at last.

The little automatic, flat, fully loaded, was tied with strips of green cloth from Castagna's pants leg to the inside of Strothers' thigh. Castagna cursed bitterly, clinging to the saddle horn with his one good hand.

"Why didn't you search him right at first?" Jaynes demanded angrily.

"It takes more steam out of them to let them go right up to where it looks like it's going to work," the sheriff said. "Build a fire, Pryor. We may as well eat again before we split up . . ."

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Strothers chewed his meat with good appetite. He had struggled like a wolf, but that was done now and his intelligence was at work again.

"What tipped it, Constable—the cigarettes?"

"Partly," Rudd said. "You wouldn't have left both packs with Sam unless you figured to be with him soon. That wasn't too much, but I knew you'd never go back down the river and let them say Ora L. Strothers was caught asleep and gave up without a fight. You really were asleep, too—on purpose."

"Sure. I got the nerve for things like that. It made it look real." Strothers' good nature was back, but he wasn't thinking of his words. His mind, Melvin knew, was thinking far ahead now, to another plan, setting himself against walls and locks and ropes and everything that could be used to restrain a man physically, pitting his fine mind against all the instruments of the thing called society.

There was a lostness in him that appalled Melvin. Strothers was a cold wind running from a foggy gorge back in the dawn age of mankind. The wind could never warm or change or remain confined. Compared to Strothers, Sam Castagna was just a lumbering animal that knocked weaker animals out of the way.

"You would have taken Castagna with you, if you could have knocked a couple of us off and got to the horses?" Melvin asked.

"Sure," Strothers said. "We planned it that way."

That was talk to be repeated in the prison yard, to be passed along the corridors of the cell block. Talk to fit the code. But not to feed the vanity of Ora L. Strothers, because it was a lie. Let Castagna, lying feverishly on the ground in Melvin's jacket, believe what Strothers said. Castagna had been left behind to build up the illusion that desperate men would surrender without a fight. That he was injured and had to be left wasn't primary in Strothers' mind, it was merely helpful coincidence.

"Which one of us was to've been first?" Melvin asked.

Strothers wiped his lips. "You, I thought. Then I changed my mind." He glanced at Jaynes.

"Yeah," Jaynes said. "I read you like a book. I wish you had tried something, Strothers."

The two men stared at each other. The antagonism that separated them was as wide as the sky.

"I'll bet you're the one shot Sam," Strothers said. "Did you shoot Joe Weyerhauser, too?"

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Jaynes didn't answer. Watching him, Melvin thought, He lacks the evil power of Strothers' intelligence, and he lacks the strength of natural good. He doesn't know what he is, and he knows it.

Strothers smiled. "I've taken half a million from the banks and never had to shoot a man. You, Snake Eyes, you're just a punk on the other side because you don't have the guts and brains of men like me. How about it?"

Jaynes leaped up. His wasp voice broke when he cursed Strothers. He gripped his rifle and stood with the butt poised to smash into Strothers' face.

"Whoa there, Jaynes!" Rudd said, but it wasn't he who stopped the rifle. With his legs tied and one arm bound behind his back, Strothers looked at Jaynes and smiled, and Jaynes lowered his rifle and walked away. After a few steps, he turned toward the creek and went there, pretending to drink.

Barker and Pryor stared at Strothers. "Don't call *me* any of your names," Barker growled.

Strothers looked at him as he might have glanced at a noisy child—and then he forgot them all. His mind was once more chewing facts and plans, even as his strong teeth chewed meat.

If this man had been led by Marty Kaygo, what kind of man was Kaygo? thought Melvin.

Rudd said, "I'll take everybody in but you and Jaynes, Melvin. Do you feel up to staying on the trail?"

There was noplace where a plane could set down to pick up Castagna. Two and a half days out, Melvin estimated. Rudd would need five men to keep an eye on Strothers day and night. They were out of food, too.

"All right," Melvin said.

Jaynes had overheard. He came back from the creek. "I'm staying, too."

Strothers smiled.

"I'll send the green plane over Shewalter Meadows three days from now," Rudd said. "With grub. Now what else will you need?"

"Send me another coat," Melvin said. "Send Jaynes another sleeping bag. We both better have packs, too."

The sheriff nodded. He put Strothers on a horse and tied him there. They lifted Castagna to the saddle again. He was going to suffer plenty before they reached the highway. Castagna looked at Melvin and said thickly, "Thanks for the coat."

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Strothers smiled at Melvin from the corners of his eyes. The smile said: Chump!

A hundred yards down the creek, a logging road took off to the left, and there went the tracks of Marty Kaygo. Melvin and Jaynes walked into second-growth timber. The sounds of the horses died away. Under his belt Melvin was carrying the pistol he had taken from Strothers.

Jaynes said, "I damn near smashed that Strothers' ugly face."

"Uh-huh."

"You can't hit a man tied up like that, not even a pen bird."

"No."

"Of course not," Jaynes said.

The road began to angle to the right, along a ridge.

"This won't take us straight to where the plane spotted Kaygo," Jaynes said. "Let's cut into the timber."

"I'm staying with his tracks. I don't know what that plane was circling over."

The road turned down the ridge again, on the side away from Shewalter Meadows. Kaygo's tracks were still there, but Jaynes was mightily impatient. "I'm going straight over the ridge," he said.

"Go ahead," Melvin answered.

"Where will I meet you, then?"

"At the Meadows."

"You sure?" Jaynes asked doubtfully.

"This old road runs into one hell of a swamp before long. I'm betting he went to the Meadows, but I'm going to follow his trail all the way."

They separated. Melvin was glad. He wanted to reduce the chase to the patient unwinding of a trail, to an end that was nothing more than law and duty, and he couldn't think of it that way so long as Jaynes was with him.

Where the swamp began, Kaygo had turned at once up the ridge. There was something in that which spoke of the man's quality, of an ability to sense the lie of a country. Most city men would have blundered deep into the swamp before deciding to turn.

Jaynes was right about down-timber on the ridge, fire-killed trees that had stood for years before rot took their roots and wind sent them crashing. Melvin went slowly. Kaygo had done the same, and before long Melvin noticed that the man had traveled as a woodsman

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does, stepping over nothing that could be walked around.

Kaygo would never exhaust himself in blind, disorderly flight. What kind of man was he?

Going down the west side of the ridge, Melvin stopped when a grouse exploded from the ground near a rotting spruce log. He drew the pistol and waited until he saw two others near the log, frozen in their protective coloration. He shot one through the head, and five more flew away.

Now an instrument of the law had broken the law for a second time during this chase—but there were, of course, degrees of breakage. A man like Strothers no doubt could make biting comments on the subject.

Melvin pulled the entrails from the bird and went on, following Kaygo's trail. The man had an eye for terrain, all right. He made few mistakes that cost him time and effort, and that was rare in any man crossing unfamiliar, wooded country.

A woodsman at some time in his life? Melvin went back over Kaygo's record. Thirty-five years old. Sixteen of those years spent in reformatories and prisons. An interesting talker. Athletic. Generally armed, considered extremely dangerous. Approach with caution.

The record fell into the glib pattern of the words under the faces on the bulletin board in Rudd's office. Gambles heavily. If forced to work, seeks employment as a clerk in a clothing store. There was nothing Melvin could recall to indicate that Kaygo had ever been five miles from city pavements.

The sun was getting low and the timber was already gathering coolness in its depths when Melvin came out on a long slope that ran down to the Meadows, two miles away.

Where the sun still lay on a bare spot near a quartz outcrop Melvin stopped, puzzled by what he saw. The mark of the steel butt-plate of Kaygo's rifle and the imprint of his shoes, one flat, the other showing no heelprint, said that Kaygo had squatted near the ant hill. Four cigarette butts crushed into the ground said that he had been here for some time.

Coolness had diminished the activity of the ants, but they were still seething in and out of their dome of sand and pine needles, and Kaygo had squatted there for perhaps an hour to watch.

It was Melvin's experience that some perverseness in man causes him to step on ant hills or to kick them in passing. This one was

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undisturbed. Kaygo had watched and gone away. Melvin had done the same thing many times. What if I have and what if he did also? he asked himself. Does that change what I have to do? But as he went on, Melvin kept wondering what Kaygo had thought as he squatted beside the ant hill.

Near dusk, Melvin lost the trail where the wide arm of a swamp came up from the drainage basin of the Meadows. But Kaygo was headed that way, Melvin was sure. One gentle turn too far to the left, back there on the long slope, would have sent Kaygo into the ragged canyons near the lower end of the Meadows.

He must have spotted the place from the top of Clover Mountain—but seeing from the heights and finding from a route through timber-choked country are two different things.

Kaygo had a fine sense of distance and direction, though. Melvin could grant him that without feeling anything else about him to impede his purpose. The purpose—and Melvin wondered why he had to keep restating it—was to bring Kaygo out, dead or alive.

On the edge of Shewalter Meadows, where the grass stood waist-high to a man all over the flooded ground and the beaver runs that led to the ponds out in the middle, Melvin stopped behind a tree and scanned the open space. There was only half light now, but that was enough.

Beavers were making ripples in the ponds and trout were leaping for their evening feeding. The Meadows lay in a great dogleg, and the upper part was cut from Melvin's view by spruce trees and high willows. The best windfalls for sleeping cover were up there, and that was where Jaynes would be, undoubtedly.

Let him stay there tonight alone. Sooner or later, Melvin would have to rejoin him, and that would be soon enough. Melvin went back into the timber and cooked his grouse. He ate half of it and laid the rest in the palm of a limb, head-high.

The night came in with a gentle rush. He dozed off on top of his sleeping bag, to awaken chilled and trembling some time later. The night was windless, the ground stony. Melvin built up the fire and warmed himself by it before getting into his sleeping bag.

Dead or alive. The thought would not submerge.

One Kaygo was a vagueness written on a record. Melvin had learned of another Kaygo today. They made a combination that would never give up.

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If Melvin had been here just to fish and loaf, to walk through the dappled fall of sunshine in the trees, and—yes, to be caught away from himself while watching the endless workings of an ant hill, to see the sun come and go on quietness, to see the elk thrusting their broad muzzles underwater to eat, to view all the things that are simple and understandable—then, he knew, he would be living for a while as man was meant to live.

You are Bill Melvin, a deputy sheriff. *He* is a man called Kaygo, an escaped murderer.

Dead or alive.

He came from dreamless sleep when the log ends of the fire were no longer flaming but drizzling smoke across a bed of coals. He felt the presence near him by the rising of the hackles on his neck, from deep memories forgotten by the human race.

Carefully, not breaking the even tenor of his breathing, he worked one hand up to the pistol on the head shield of the sleeping bag.

The man was squatted by the fire with a rifle across his knees. His curling brown hair caught a touch of redness from the glow of embers. The light outlined a sandy beard, held steady on wide cheekbones, and lost itself in the hollows under massive brows. The man's trousers were muddy as high as the knees where the fabric was strained smooth by his position. They might have been any color. But there was no doubt that the shirt was green.

The face by itself was enough.

It was Marty Kaygo.

He was eating what was left of Melvin's grouse.

He turned the carcass in his hands, gnawing, chewing—and all the while his face was set toward the shadows where Melvin lay.

Slowly Melvin worked the pistol along the edge of the ground until, lying on his side, he raised it just a trifle. The front sight was a white bead that lined across the coals to Kaygo's chest. Melvin's thumb pushed the safety down.

Kaygo's long-rifle cartridges—just spots of lead that could sing over space and kill. Kaygo the cop-killer. Speak to him, tell him to put up his hands and let his rifle fall. If he swung the rifle to fire, the pistol could also sing and kill.

From where did the whisper come that fire and food must be shared even with a deadly enemy? From the jungle all around that might pull them both beneath its slime an instant later?

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The sabre-tooth tiger and the great reptiles were out there in the night. And men were men together, if only for a moment. The jungle was not gone, merely changed.

Melvin let the pistol rest on the ground.

Marty Kaygo rose. He was not a tall man. Even in his prison shoes he moved lightly as he stepped to a tree and replaced the carcass of the grouse. He grinned, still looking toward where Melvin lay.

And then he was gone.

Melvin lay a long time before he fell asleep again.

When he rose in the bitter cold of morning, he went at once to the dead fire. There were the tracks. He took the grouse from the limb. One leg was untouched.

Staring out to where the first long-slanting rays of the sun were driving mist from the beaver ponds and wet grass, Melvin held the chilled grouse in his hands.

What's the matter with me?

The truth was, Jaynes was Melvin and Melvin was Jaynes, great developments of the centuries—and Kaygo did not fit where they belonged. But—

Melvin shivered.

He went out of the timber into the sunshine, and he sat down to let it warm him while he ate the rest of the grouse. There before him, leading through the grey mud out toward the wickerwork of the beaver dams, were the tracks of Kaygo. He had crossed the boggy ground by night, walking the beaver dams above deep water, returning the same way. It was not an easy feat even in daytime.

I wish I could talk to him, Melvin thought.

The shot was a cracking violation of the wilderness quiet. It came from somewhere around the dogleg of the Meadows.

Melvin went back to the campsite and got his gear.

Before he turned the dogleg, he saw Jaynes coming toward him. Jaynes stopped and waited.

"What the hell happened to you, Melvin?" There was blood on Jaynes' shirt.

"I followed his trail, just as I said I would. You shoot a deer?"

"Yeah. That's one thing there's plenty of here. Kaygo's around. I saw his tracks in the upper part of the Meadows last night. We'll get him. I know every inch—"

"Let's get at the deer . . ."

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They roasted meat, and then Jaynes was impatient to be off.

"Just hold your steam," said Melvin. "We've got another two days before the plane drops chow, so we're going to start drying some of this meat."

"There's lots of deer."

"We'll dry some of this. We don't know where that plane will drop our supplies, or what they'll be like when we get to them. And you're not going to shoot a deer every day, Jaynes."

They cut the meat in thin strips and laid it on the grey twigs of a fallen tree until the branches were festooned with dangling brown meat. Camp-robber birds were there at once, floating in, snatching.

"How you going to stop that?" Jaynes asked.

"By staying here. I'm going to do some smoking with a willow fire, too. Take a turn around the Meadows. See what you can find out. You know every inch of the land."

"I'll do that." Jaynes took his rifle and strode away.

He was back at noon. "Where'd you camp, Melvin?"

Melvin told him.

"Well, he was there, this morning. He crossed the swamp and went back the same way. He's in the timber on this side somewhere. He's getting smart now about covering his tracks."

"What's he eating?" Melvin asked cleverly.

"I don't know, and I don't care. He slept one night under a windfall. Where'd he learn that, Melvin?" Jaynes was worried.

"I think it must come to him naturally. He's probably enjoying more freedom right now than he's had in his whole life."

Jaynes grunted. He eyed the tree that was serving as a drying rack. "Hey! Do you suppose we could pull him in with that?" He looked all around at the fringe of trees. "Say we go down into the timber on the other side and then circle back to that little knob over there. About three hundred yards." Jaynes rubbed the oily sheen of his rifle barrel. "One shot, Melvin."

"You think he's hungry enough to try it?"

"He must be."

"The birds will scatter our meat."

"Part of a lousy deer or one jailbird! What's the matter with you, Melvin?"

The venison was not going to cure before the plane came in and Melvin knew it. He had stalled long enough.

They went a half mile beside the lower Meadows. On the way, Jaynes stepped sidewise to jump into an ant hill and twist his

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feet—and then he went on, stamping ants loose from his shoes. "He must be hungry enough by now."

They went back through the timber and crept behind a log on the little hill across the field from their camp. The smoky birds were having a merry time with the meat.

Now Jaynes was patient. His eyes caught every movement across the park, and his position didn't seem to strain his muscles. They stayed until the shadows lowered cold on their backs. It was then that they heard the rifle shot somewhere in the lower Meadows, two miles away.

"He's got his own meat." Melvin laughed.

Jaynes rose. "What's so damn funny about it?"

Melvin had wrapped his undershirt around a venison haunch, but the blowflies had got to it anyway. He brushed the white larvae away.

They roasted meat and ate in silence.

Marty Kaygo was still around Shewalter Meadows. They cut his sign the next day, and they found where he had killed the deer. The convict was here, and it seemed that he intended to stay.

Jaynes was infuriated. And he was speechless for a while when they returned to camp that night and found that Kaygo had stolen Melvin's sleeping bag.

"Who are the tenderfeet around here?" Melvin laughed again.

"You don't act like you want to catch him! By God, I do, and I'll stay here all summer to do it if I have to!"

"To catch him?"

"To kill him! I'm going to gut-shoot him for this little trick!"

"You would have anyway." There was no humor now in stealing the sleeping bag.

The plane came in on the afternoon of the third day. Clouds were scudding across the peaks and the pilot was in a hurry to beat out a local storm. He banked sharply to look down at the two men standing in the open dryness of the upper Meadows.

He went on east, high above the timber. They saw him fighting a tricky wind. On the next bank he kicked out the box. The parachute became a white cone. Lining out with a tailwind boosting him, the pilot sped away toward Scott.

"If he had any brains he'd've stayed to make sure we got it," Jaynes said. "Typical state employee."

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A great windfront flowing in from the mountains struck them with a chill that spoke of the rain soon to follow. Melvin watched the plane bouncing jerkily in downdrafts above the canyons. "The pilot's all right, Jaynes."

"Look at that thing drift!"

They knew for sure after another few moments that the box would not land in the upper Meadows. Melvin said, "Wouldn't it be something if it lit right at Kaygo's feet?"

"Big fine joke, huh?"

They trotted across the creek and down along the edge of the Big Shewalter to keep the chute in sight. They were a long way from it when they saw it splash into the water near the opposite side of the flooded area. An instant later the rain boiled down on them.

"I hope they had sense enough to put the stuff in cans." Jaynes turned up the collar of his jacket.

The ponds were dancing froth now. Through the mist they saw Kaygo run from the timber and wade out after the box.

Jaynes dropped to one knee. He pushed his scope down and began to click the sight adjustment. "Eight hundred yards," he muttered. His rifle bellowed with the thunder on the mountains. "Where'd I hit?"

"I couldn't tell."

The first hard blast of rain was sweeping on. Jaynes fired again, and this time Melvin saw the bullet strike the water to the left of Kaygo, chest-deep now, towing the box to shore with the shroud-lines of the chute.

"About five feet to the left," Melvin said.

Kaygo sprawled into the grass when the next shot came.

"That did it," Melvin said.

"No. He ducked."

Kaygo raised up. Skidding the box over wet grass and mud, he reached timber while Jaynes tried two more shots. Over that distance, through wind and rain, Jaynes had performed well—but Kaygo was still free.

Kaygo's boldness was worth applause, but Melvin felt only a bleak apathy. The end had been delayed, that was all.

"Come on!" Jaynes said.

"Across that open swamp? No, thanks. We'll work through the timber."

"He's got our stuff!"

"He's got a rifle, too . . ."

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The box had been fastened with wing nuts, easy to tap loose. The packs Melvin had asked for were gone, and the jacket, and about three-fourths of the food, Melvin estimated. The sleeping bag had been unrolled. Rain was filtering through the pines on a manila envelope containing a note.

They peered into the gloom of the wet forest. It was no time to press Kaygo hard, they knew.

While Jaynes raged, Melvin read the note. "Rudd started in at noon today with big posse. He says not to take any chances. He says there were *two* .22 pistols and a hunting knife taken from the filling station."

"That's a big help!" Jaynes cursed the weather, the pilot, and the stupidity of circumstance.

"I told you on Clover Mountain I was sick of you, Jaynes. Now shut up! You're lucky Kaygo didn't slice your sleeping bag to pieces or throw it into the water."

"I'm fed up with you, too, Melvin! You didn't even try to shoot a while ago. You act like the stinking louse is your brother!"

My brother. The thought plowed through Melvin, leaving a fresh wake. It was not yet fashionable to speak of men as brothers; you killed your brother, just like anybody else.

They plodded toward camp, carrying the cans of food in their hands. The labels began to soak off. Melvin finished the job on the cans he was holding.

"That's smart," Jaynes said. "Now what's in them?"

"You're right, they're no good to us any more. A hungry man has to know what he's getting." Melvin began to hurl the cans into a beaver pond until Jaynes pleaded with him.

"Then shut your mouth for a while!" Melvin cried.

They went on to camp through a cold rain that soaked into Melvin's soul.

"Soup!" Jaynes said later, when they sat under a dripping tree before a smoking fire. "Kaygo's back in the timber having hot coffee and plenty of canned chicken."

Jaynes could not destroy everything, for he had the unrealized power to give laughter. Melvin began to laugh while Jaynes stared at him angrily. Was it the sound of laughter, as well as the smell of fire, that caused the monsters of the long-ago jungle to raise their heads in fear?

"I said I'd get Kaygo if it took me all summer. You sit here and laugh, Melvin. *I'll get him!*"

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They found the second pack the next morning, empty, hanging on a tree. "He's cached part of the grub somewhere," Jaynes growled. "He couldn't have put it all in one pack. Smart! He did it in the rain, and now we can't backtrack him."

But they could trail him in the fresh dampness. Kaygo had realized that, too; he had gone far south of the Meadows, and on a rocky ridge they lost his trail. The ridge was a great spur that ran down from Spearhead Mountain, bucking through lesser cross-ridges arrogantly. The lower end of it, Melvin knew, wasn't eight miles from the highway.

"Maybe he's clearing out," Jaynes said. "He read that note about Rudd. He knows he's going to get it. He's headed for the highway now. Somebody else will get him, after all we've done!"

"Pathetic, ain't it?" Melvin looked at Spearhead Mountain. "Maybe he went that way. He really likes these mountains."

"What do you mean?"

"Nothing you'd understand. He's gone toward Spearhead, Jaynes."

"The highway! I'm going after him, Melvin. If I don't cut his trail by the time I hit Bandbox Creek, I'll come back. Don't sneak off this time and camp by yourself. He could have walked right in on you that night."

"Yes, he could have killed me, I suppose."

Jaynes' eyes narrowed. "Those tracks beside your fire the next morning—one of yours was on top of his, Melvin. He sneaked in while you were asleep, didn't he? And you were ashamed to mention it to me! It's a wonder he didn't take your rifle and sleeping bag right from under you. I'll mention that to Rudd when he gets here."

"You do that, Jaynes." Harlan Rudd had shared food and fire with outlaws in the old days, and he wasn't ashamed to talk about it now that he was sheriff. "Get out of my sight, Jaynes, before I forget I'm a brother to you, too!"

"Brother?" Jaynes gave Melvin a baffled look before he started down the ridge.

There was something Kaygo could not have known about this ridge: it appeared to be the natural route to Spearhead, but higher up it was a jumble of tree-covered cliffs.

Melvin stayed on it only until he found where Kaygo had slipped from his careful walking on rocks and left a mark which he had

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tried to smooth away. Then Melvin left the ridge and took a roundabout, but faster, route toward Spearhead.

He went too rapidly. In midafternoon he saw Kaygo far below him, between two curving buttresses of the mountain. The fugitive was not pushing himself.

While Melvin watched through his glasses, Kaygo removed the stolen pack and lay down in a field of columbines, pillowing his head on the stolen sleeping bag. The wind was cold on Melvin's sweating skin as he hugged his vantage point behind the rocks.

Jaynes might have made a shot from here; he would have tried, although the range was four hundred yards greater than yesterday across the Big Shewalter. Melvin knew his own rifle would do no more than scare Kaygo down the hill.

Like hunting sheep, he thought. You have to wait and try to make them blunder into you.

Kaygo lay there for an hour. He was not asleep. He moved occasionally, but mostly he lay there looking at the sky and clouds.

He was wallowing in freedom—that was it. Damn him, he wouldn't do what fugitives are supposed to do! He insisted on acting like a man enjoying life.

My brother down there, Melvin thought. Yes, and I'll kill him when he comes near enough on the saddle of the mountain.

Kaygo rose at last, but he did not go. He stretched his arms to the sky, as if he would clutch a great section of it. Then he sat down and smoked a cigarette.

The sweat was tight and dry on Melvin. The wind scampered through his clothing. Of course I have to kill him, he told himself. He's found something he loves so much he won't be taken from it any other way.

Kaygo went up at last. Melvin slipped behind the rib of the mountain and climbed steadily. The wind was growing quiet now. There was a sullen heaviness in the air. It would rain again today.

Melvin was far ahead when he took a position among rocks that overlooked the saddle. He could see Kaygo, still in no hurry, coming up the harder way, coming over a red iron dike that had made the notch on Spearhead back when man clutched his club and splashed toward refuge as the clamor broke out in the forest.

It was his job. Society paid him, Melvin reminded himself. Climb faster, Marty Kaygo. You'll have your chance to go back where you belong, and when you refuse, the job will be done quickly.

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The air grew heavily quiet. Melvin blinked when he heard a tiny snap and saw a blue spark run along his rifle barrel. He rubbed his hand against his woolen shirt. His palm crackled with pinpoint sparks and the fibers of the sleeve tried to follow the hand away. He stroked his hair and heard the little noises and felt the hair rising.

All this was not uncommon on the heights in summer when a storm was making, but Melvin had never experienced it before. It gave him a weird sensation.

Kaygo came into the saddle when the air was fully charged. He jumped when blue light ran along his rifle barrel. He was then two hundred yards away from Melvin. He would have to pass much closer. Kaygo stared in wonder at his rifle, and then at the leaden sky.

He held up his hunting knife. Sparks played on the point. Kaygo laughed. He raised both knife and rifle and watched the electricity come to them.

A little later he discovered that steel was not necessary to draw static from the swollen air. Kaygo's fingers, held aloft, drew sparks. He did a dance on the rocks, shouting his wonder and pleasure. Strange balls of light ran along the iron dike and the air was filled with a sterile odor.

This day on Spearhead Mountain, Marty Kaygo roared with joy.

Melvin had never heard laughter run so cleanly. Laughter from the littered caves above the slime; laughter from the tree perch safe from walking beasts; laughter challenging the brutes.

It didn't last. The rain came just after the first whistling surge of wind. The bursting air cleared.

Kaygo trotted easily for shelter, his head lowered against the pelt of ice. He came straight toward the rocks where Melvin lay. There was a clatter somewhere behind Melvin, granite slipping on granite, but he had no time to wonder.

"Kaygo!" he yelled. "Drop it!"

The man threw up his head as he ran and he brought the rifle up, not hesitating.

My brother, Melvin thought. That held him one split second longer, with his finger on the trigger and his sights on Kaygo's chest.

Another rifle roared behind him. Kaygo's legs jerked as he tried to keep running. He went down and his hands reached out for the wet stones. That was all.

Jaynes came limping through the rocks. "I hurt my knee, but I got him, rain and all!"

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Melvin could not rise for a moment. He felt frozen to the rock.

At last he came up, slowly.

"You were right," Jaynes said. "He took the hard way. After I left you, I got to thinking that was what he would do."

They went across the stones to Kaygo. Jaynes turned him over. "Heart. I said I didn't miss running shots, not very often." That was all the interest he had in Marty Kaygo—and now that vanished, too.

Jaynes slipped the pack from the dead man's back. "Steal our chow, would he! Grab your sleeping bag and let's get out of here. Rudd and the others can take care of the chores now. Four for four, Melvin."

"You're counting Strothers?"

"I wish that bigmouth had tried something."

The rain was the coldest that ever fell on Melvin. He unrolled the sleeping bag and covered Kaygo with it, weighting the sides with stones.

Jaynes started to protest, but near the end he helped. "I guess even Kaygo deserves something. He wasn't a bad-looking character at that, was he?"

All this time Melvin had not looked at Jaynes. Now he picked up Jaynes' rifle. Deliberately, he began to smash it against a rock. He splintered the stock and the forestock. He bent the bolt and he battered the scope until it was a twisted tube hanging by one mount, and he continued to beat the breech against the rock until the front sight ripped his palm and the impacts numbed his wrists.

He dropped the rifle then and stood breathing hard.

Jaynes had cursed loudly at first, but then he had stopped. The hard glitter was gone from his eyes.

Now, in the voice of a man who lives with splinters in his soul, Jaynes said, "By God, you're going to buy me a new rifle, Melvin. What's the matter with you, anyway?"

Melvin said nothing. Then together they started down the rain-soaked mountain.

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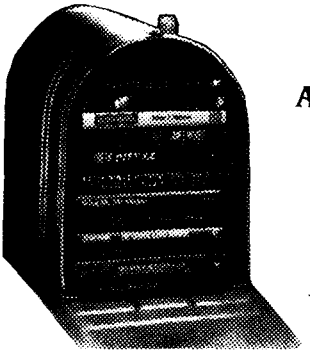

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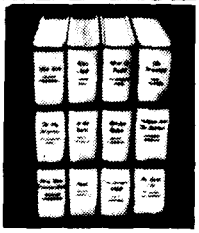

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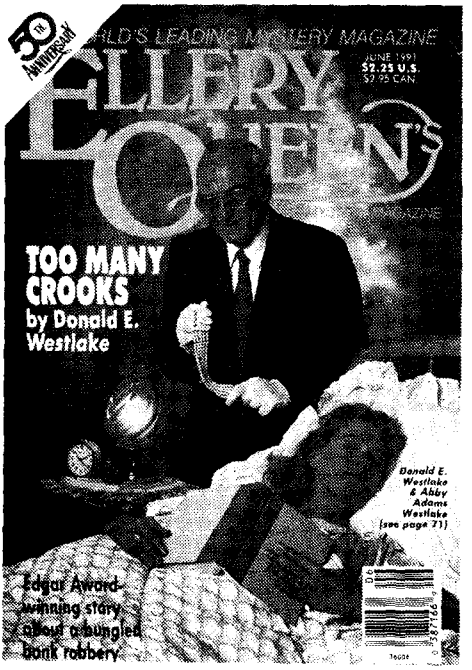
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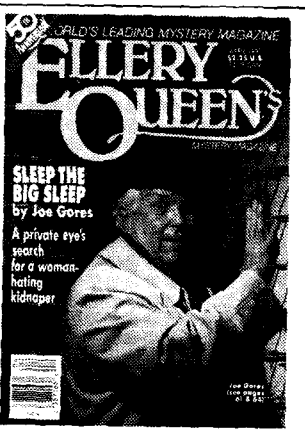
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